Guitar MAGAZINE

DEC 2021
ISSUE 399
£6.25

DO GIBSON'S GENERATION COLLECTION ACOUSTICS GIVE YOU THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE?

GENERATION NEXT

HOW TO BUY A VINTAGE TELECASTER

WIN A D'ANGELICO WORTH OVER £700

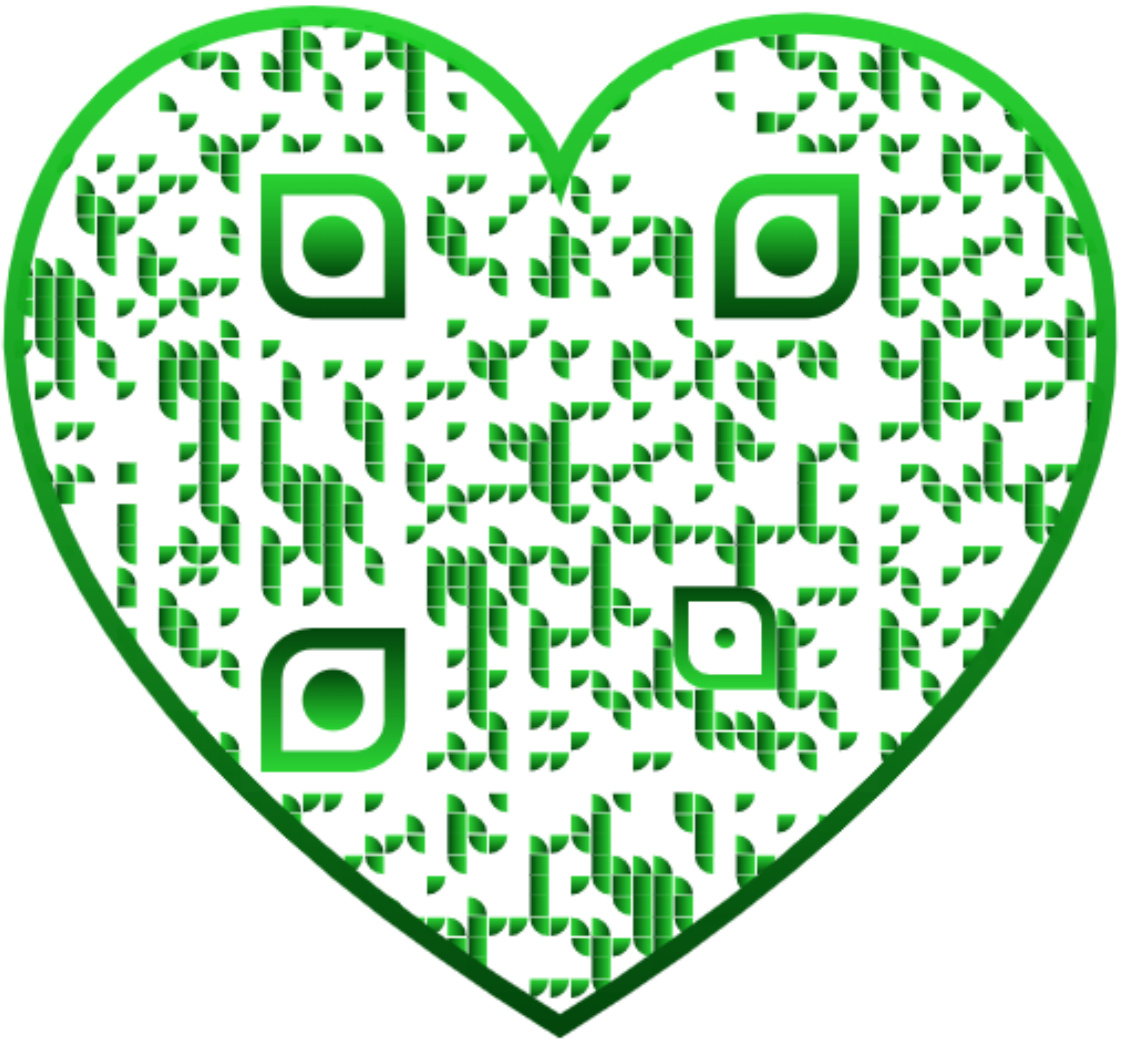
PLAY GUITAR LIKE DAVID GILMOUR

THE EXILE ON MAIN ST. BURST UP CLOSE

"THERE WERE NO RULES, NO DEADLINES AND NO EXPECTATIONS"

THE GLORIOUS RETURN OF

THE WAR ON DRUGS



©2021 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. All Rights Reserved. FENDER (standard and in stylized form), STRATOCASTER, STRAT and the distinctive headstock shapes commonly found on the FENDER instruments are trademarks of Fender Musical Instruments Corporation and/or its affiliates, registered in the U.S. and other countries.

CONTENTS

32

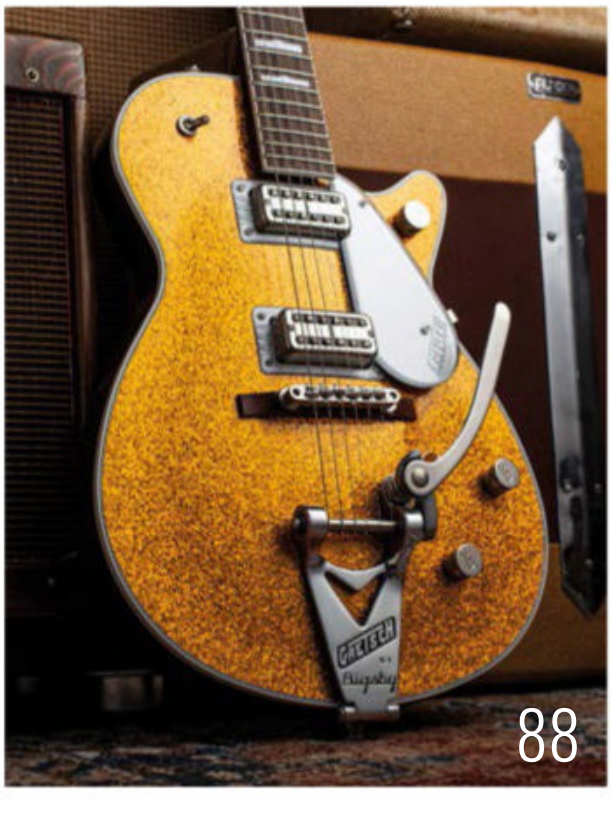
98

78

102

72
60

24



88

ISSUE 399

CONTENTS

009 EDITOR'S LETTER
010 CONTRIBUTORS PAGE
012 FRETBUZZ
014 SUBSCRIBE
016 ONES TO WATCH: MELIN MELYN
018 ALBUM SPOTLIGHT: DAVY KNOWLES
019 THE PLAYLIST
020 WIN! D'ANGELICO EXCEL GRAMERCY
022 BRUCE KIER: 1961-2021
024 INTERVIEW: SNAIL MAIL
032 THE GUITAR INTERVIEW: THE WAR ON DRUGS
042 INTERVIEW: MY MORNING JACKET
048 THE MONEY SHOT: JOHNNY MARR/DONOVAN'S FENDER THINLINE TELECASTER
052 HOW TO BUY A VINTAGE FENDER TELECASTER
060 THE COLLECTION: SIMON WHITE
072 COLUMN: JOSH SCOTT
078 REVIEW: GIBSON GENERATION COLLECTION G-45 & G-00
088 REVIEW: GRETSCH VINTAGE SELECT 1989 DUO JET
092 REVIEW: CHARVEL PRO-MOD SAN DIMAS STYLE 1 HSS HT E & HSS FR M
098 REVIEW: RIVOLTA REGATA VII
102 REVIEW: WALRUS AUDIO ERAS
104 REVIEW: MOD DEVICES DWARF
106 REVIEW: THIMBLE WASP EFFECTS TIME LAPSE, SPACE CAMP & ANVIL
110 INDUSTRY INSIDER: PARAGRAM GUITARS
112 SHOP TALK: GENE BAKER, B3 GUITARS
119 DIY: TRUSS ROD TIPS
124 AMPLIFIER FAQ
126 FIVE MINUTES TO... DAVID GILMOUR
128 CHORD CLINIC
130 TALKBOX: ISY SUTTIE

Gibson

GENERATION COLLECTION

GIBSON.COM/GENERATION

NEW EXCLUSIVE GIBSON PLAYER PORT™,
INSPIRED BY A 1960'S BLUEPRINT FROM THE
GIBSON ARCHIVES, PROVIDES A TRULY UNIQUE
AND IMMERSIVE SONIC EXPERIENCE.
FINALLY - HEAR MORE OF YOU.

BEAUTIFUL SOLID SITKA SPRUCE
TOP WITH SOLID WALNUT BACK
AND SIDES PROVIDES A CRISP
AND RESONANT SOUNDING TONE
FOR ANY STYLE OF PLAY.

A SLIM, COMFORTABLE NECK PROFILE MAKES THESE ACOUSTICS A PLEASURE TO PLAY FOR HOURS.

HANDMADE IN THE USA BY THE SAME HIGHLY SKILLED CRAFTSPEOPLE WHO MAKE ALL GIBSON ACOUSTICS.

A NEW, ACCESSIBLE PRICE-POINT FOR PLAYERS OF ALL LEVELS.

eastmanguitars.com

EASTMAN

AC SERIES REFINED

MODERN AND PROGRESSIVE IN ALL THE RIGHT WAYS.

Guitar MAGAZINE

BandLab UK Limited
Unit 7, Riverside Court,
Lower Bristol Road,
Bath BA2 3DZ

EDITORIAL

CHIEF EDITOR Chris Vinnicombe
MANAGING EDITOR Josh Gardner
ART EDITOR Philip Millard
PRODUCTION EDITOR Sean McGeady
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Sam Roberts
INSTRUMENT PHOTOGRAPHY Eleanor Jane
CONTRIBUTORS Huw Baines, Darran Charles, Chris Fantana, Rod Fogg, Leigh Fuge, Dave Hunter, Ed Oleszko, Huw Price, Richard Purvis, Josh Scott, Gary Walker, Michael Watts, Emma Wilkes
HAVE A STORY? Email us at editors@guitar.com

SALES

ASSOCIATE MANAGER, COMMERCIAL AND PARTNERSHIPS Joe Supple
joe.supple@guitar.com

PRODUCTION & OPERATIONS

PUBLISHING PRODUCTION MANAGER Craig Broadbridge
PRINT William Gibbons & Sons Ltd
DISTRIBUTED BY Marketforce (UK) Ltd
5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU

BANDLAB TECHNOLOGIES

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Meng Ru Kuok
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Ivan Chen
UK COUNTRY DIRECTOR & HEAD OF STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS (EMEA) Holly Bishop
AVP, WEB TECHNOLOGIES Laurent Le Graverend
AVP, GROUP & BRAND STRATEGY Krystle Hall
ART DIRECTOR Simon Freeborough
MANAGER, CONTENT STRATEGY Iliyas Ong
STAFF WRITERS Cillian Breathnach, Daniel Seah
ASSOCIATE, CONTENT PRODUCTION Billy Chua

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

guitar.com/subscribe
Tel +44 (0) 1371 851 882
Calls cost 7p per minute plus your phone company's access charge

BANDLAB TECHNOLOGIES

All content copyright BandLab UK Limited 2021, all rights reserved. While we make every effort to ensure that the factual content of *Guitar Magazine* is correct, we cannot take any responsibility nor be held accountable for any factual errors printed. Please make every effort to check quoted prices and product specifications with manufacturers prior to purchase. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or resold without the prior consent of BandLab UK Limited. *Guitar Magazine* recognises all copyrights contained within this issue. Where possible, we acknowledge the copyright.

EDITOR'S LETTER

TOP BRASS

Welcome to issue 399 of *Guitar Magazine*. This month's cover guitar is part of Gibson's Generation Collection – a soundport-equipped set of relatively affordable new acoustics hailing from the firm's Bozeman, Montana acoustic facility and inspired by a trailblazing blueprint from way back in 1964.

You can read all about them on p78 onwards and hear them for yourself at youtube.com/theguitarmagazine but here's the thing: if such radical ideas as acoustic guitar soundports were left on the cutting room floor during the McCarty era, what else is in the Gibson company archive?

It's certainly fun to imagine the kinds of ideas that the likes of Ted McCarty, Leo Fender and Paul Bigsby might have explored that never saw the light of day. Did Ted and his team in Kalamazoo sketch out drawings of the first headless bass?

Meanwhile, was Leo experimenting with multi-scale guitars over in SoCal? Probably not. But the idea that they might have is no more silly than the 76lb solid brass guitar that Ibanez built for the 1979 NAMM Show in Chicago. Yes, the guitar that weighed as much as 10 Telecasters was apparently a real, fully functioning thing – look it up and prepare to be amazed.

Enjoy this month's magazine, then, but be sure to come back next month too – it's issue 400, after all, so you can expect fireworks.

Chris Vinnicombe
Chief Editor, Guitar.com & Guitar Magazine
chris@guitar.com

DON'T MISS OUT!

Visit us online for the latest on gear, artists, technique and the guitar industry
Guitar.com | facebook.com/guitar | youtube.com/theguitarmagazine
instagram.com/guitar | twitter.com/guitar

Guitar CONTRIBUTORS

With the release of Gibson's new archive-inspired Generation Collection acoustics, reviewed on p78, we asked some of our recent contributors to dip into their own mental archive and dig out their all-time favourite acoustic campfire anthem

JUSTIN BECKNER

ROLLING STONE

Not only has Justin written guitar content for more than 20 years, he's also worked as a tech and luthier, and has amassed more than 40 guitars, from vintage gems to wild custom builds. Recently he's been working on a series of articles dispelling common internet myths surrounding iconic artists and the gear they use. Go to *Guitar.com* to read them. But what would he play around the campfire? "You might hear me playing *Like A Rolling Stone* by Dylan," he says, "as I grew up a few miles from his childhood home in Minnesota." Some pedigree, eh?

CILLIAN BREATHNACH

WICKER MAN

As well as covering the latest industry and artist news for *Guitar.com*, Bristol-based Cillian makes industrial-level noise with his Squier Affinity Jazzmaster tuned to F standard. As you might expect, Cillian's campfire anthem is more portentous than most. "It has to be *Lord Summerisle* by Blood Ceremony, with its cosy, communal feel and earthen subject matter," he says. "It's also just foreboding enough to keep you glancing out into the darkness as you sing." Scared? Us? No way.

DARRAN CHARLES

LIFE AND SOUL

For this issue, our resident shred pundit tackled Charvel's new Pro-Mod guitars. "The hardtail was my first introduction to sassafras," he says. "I instantly became a fan of the lightweight, tonally characterful wood." Flick to p92 for his full review. Darran would probably have to pick up something a little more demure to play around the campfire, though. "If forced to strum an acoustic around a fire, I'd probably gravitate to the mournful but epic *Go Ahead* by Rufus Wainwright." That's the spirit, Darran!

ROD FOGG

HIGH-FLIER

London-born Rod owns about 30 guitars, including a Maccaferri, which might be the perfect weapon with which to demonstrate his chops around the crackling campfire. "Octave intro to show off a bit, deep lyrics and a singalong chorus, cool chord shapes moving around against the open strings, I'd go for *High And Dry* by Radiohead," he says. Good call. To heat up your own acoustic abilities, go to p128, where Rod's Chord Clinic will help you add all manner of inversions and variations to the classic A major chord. Happy camping.

GARY WALKER

GLASTO SURVIVOR

Former *Guitar* managing editor Gary put himself in the line of fire for this issue, having come down with a serious case of GAS after Jim James and Carl Broemel of My Morning Jacket explained to him their 22 tour guitars. Flip to p42 for more – and get well soon, Gary. His favourite campfire song? "Having been psychologically scarred by too many ritual 3am butcherings of Bob Marley & The Wailers' *Redemption Song* at Glastonbury over the years, I'm wary of campfire songs. But I'd go for something timeless such as *The Weight* by The Band."

MICHAEL WATTS

TONE GENERATOR

Mike got to grips with some generational Gibson guitars for this issue – the accessible new Generation Collection acoustics. "As a fan of Gibson and having grown up loving Les Pauls, SGs, L5s and ES5 Switchmasters, it's heartening to see great instruments coming from the brand at all price points." Go to p78 to read what he thinks of them. Mike's campfire option would be Michael Hedges' *Ariel Boundaries*. "Some of the most perfect music known to man," he says, "and a viable alternative to *Mr Brightside* when all else fails."

A TRIBUTE TO A

SONGWRITING LEGEND

GUILD A-20 MARLEY

INSPIRED BY BOB MARLEY'S
AT-HOME, SONGWRITING GUITAR
FROM 56 HOPE ROAD IN KINGSTON.

DISCOVER THE STORY BEHIND THE GUITAR
AT GUILDGUITARS.COM/MARLEY

MARLEY x Guild

BOB MARLEY

TM and © 2021 Fifty-Six Hope Road Music, Ltd.
Used under license.
bobmarley.com

FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

Go for gold: Simon's P-90-loaded semi-hollow partscaster

Tails unexpected: Alex's ES-339 may be about to get modified

PLAY YOUR PART

Hi, *Guitar Magazine*. I enclose a few photos of my first partscaster build, which I have recently completed. For other readers who may be considering building a partscaster, I would recommend it without hesitation. I managed to design and assemble a very serviceable guitar which is subtly different from anything available off the shelf from the big companies, and all with fairly basic skills and tools. It's off to a pro guitar tech now for the final setup and tweaks, so it is ready for my band's biggest-ever gig (potentially thousands of spectators rather than our usual tens!). So here's to guitar building and gigging again!

SIMON BRIMS, EDINBURGH, UK

TRAPEZE ARTIST

Hello, team *Guitar*! Great review on the Gibson Nashville ES guitars in the September issue. I own an ES-339, and I'm really in love with the sound and overall experience of playing this guitar – it's simply amazing. But I have a query that I hope you can help me clarify. I would like to customize my ES-339 by adding a trapeze tailpiece but I'm not sure if it's necessarily a good idea, or if it would even be possible. What do you think?

ALEX SOTO, VIA EMAIL

An interesting conundrum, Alex. The ES-339 is smaller in body size than an ES-335 or similar, and so you'll have to double-check that a trapeze tailpiece designed for a regular ES will fit your guitar. It's possible that it will, but with a smaller gap between the bridge and the tailpiece. Alternatively, the ES-390 was similarly proportioned to the ES-339 and sported a trapeze, so tracking one of those down could be an option.

If you do decide to switch tailpieces on your existing guitar, you'll also be left with two holes in the top that will need filling or covering. In terms of sonics, it will probably sound a little mellower and less snappy than it does at present, and perhaps the feel will be a little more elastic. But, given the likely proximity of the trapeze to the bridge compared to an ES-335, any tonal differences will be less pronounced than they would on a larger instrument. Which is a long way of saying that it's certainly possible to add a trapeze tailpiece to your guitar, but we're not sure that it's worth the hassle for the sonic and playability benefits. Good luck!

ALL-IN FOR NORLIN

I've been reading *Guitar Magazine* for a good number of years and while I recall numerous articles about pre-CBS and CBS era Fenders, I don't recall any about the much criticised Norlin era Gibsons?

I do think that would be quite popular, as prices for 50s and early 60s Gibsons are for many unattainable. But there must be some gems worth seeking out among the Norlin guitars at not unreasonable prices.

PAUL O'HALLORAN, LONDON, UK

It's true that many more words have been written about the CBS era at Fender than Gibson's Norlin years, and maybe that should change. You're quite right – as golden-era guitars reach prices that are even further beyond the means of those of us who don't have a seat booked on Jeff Bezos' next suborbital jaunt, interest in the oft-maligned instruments of the 1970s continues to grow. In the meantime, we'd love to see pictures of any 70s Gibsons that you have in your collection.

GOOD TO GO

WHENEVER · WHEREVER

A passion for playing means that inspiration can strike anytime, anywhere. With Elixir® Strings you know that when you pick up your guitar it's going to sound great—time and time again. That's because our featherweight coating protects your strings from the elements, keeping corrosion away and allowing your tone to sound great for longer, in any environment.

Elixir® STRINGS

Elixir Strings. Performance-ready with long-lasting tone.

GORE, *Together, improving life,* ELIXIR, NANOWEB, POLYWEB, OPTIWEB, GREAT TONE • LONG LIFE, "e" icon, and designs are trademarks of W. L. Gore & Associates. ©2009-2021 W. L. Gore & Associates, Inc.

Guitar MAGAZINE

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE UP TO 35%*

JUST £22.99 EVERY SIX MONTHS SAVING 35% OFF THE UK COVER PRICE

GET YOUR MONTHLY SUPPLY
OF NEW GEAR REVIEWS, IN-DEPTH FEATURES,
WORKSHOPS AND TUITION

SPREAD THE COST
BY CONVENIENT DIRECT DEBIT*

FREE UK DELIVERY

NOT IN THE UK?

DON'T WORRY – WE'VE GOT SPECIAL OFFERS FOR INTERNATIONAL READERS TOO

EUROPE €39.99 EVERY 6 MONTHS – SAVE 35%
AUSTRALIA $58.99 AUD EVERY 6 MONTHS – SAVE 35%
USA/CANADA $42.99 EVERY 6 MONTHS – SAVE 35%
REST OF THE WORLD £34.99 EVERY 6 MONTHS

ORDER ONLINE TODAY AT GUITAR.COM/SUBSCRIBE

ORDER NOW!

ONLINE
GUITAR.COM/SUBSCRIBE
USE CODE **GMPR2021**

PHONE
01371 851 882
USE CODE **GMPR2021**

CODE **GMPR2021**

OFFER ENDS **31 DECEMBER 2021**

*35% saving is available to UK customers paying by Direct Debit only. You will pay just £22.99 every 6 months, saving 35% off the UK cover price. All other savings are based on the local cover price for Europe, Australia and North America and are available when you pay by continuous card payment only. You will receive 12 issues of *Guitar Magazine* per year, starting with the next available issue.

Guitar MAGAZINE

DEC 2021
ISSUE 399
£6.25

DO GIBSON'S GENERATION COLLECTION ACOUSTICS GIVE YOU THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE?

GENERATION NEXT

HOW TO BUY A VINTAGE TELECASTER

WIN A D'ANGELICO WORTH OVER £700

PLAY GUITAR LIKE DAVID GILMOUR

THE EXILE ON MAIN ST. BURST UP CLOSE

"THERE WERE NO RULES, NO DEADLINES AND NO EXPECTATIONS"

THE GLORIOUS RETURN OF

THE WAR ON DRUGS

ONES TO WATCH

MELIN MELYN

WORDS SAM ROBERTS

Guitarist Will Barratt discusses his love of Burns guitars, reimagining Welsh folktales for a contemporary audience, and fans climbing trees to watch their Green Man set

One of the most refreshing acts on the UK indie scene right now, psychedelic sextet Melin Melyn are quickly acquiring a loyal and engaged fanbase through their cross-genre approach to soft rock. Having recently signed to Sheffield-based Bingo Records, the band should soon reap the kind of support that has helped labelmates John Myrtle and Mr Ben & The Bens to become so admired by the likes of Radio 6 Music.

With their atypical bilingual approach to lyricism – through which they reimagine centuries-old Welsh folklore for the modern era – the band leave no stone unturned on their forward-thinking new EP *Blomonj*. Here, we chat to Burns-wielding guitarist Will Barratt about ditching violin in favour of the guitar, his sprawling pedalboard (and buying the same pedal twice), and ensuring that his playing remains at the forefront of the Melin Melyn's music.

What inspired you to pick up a guitar?

"I had violin lessons at school but couldn't get anywhere with it. I started holding it like a guitar, plucking the *Smoke On The Water* riff. That was when my dad decided to get me a guitar. For as long as I can remember I've been listening to Johnny Cash, so that percussive style he used with his right hand to chug out the rhythm really stuck with me. *Folsom Prison Blues* was the first thing I learnt to play all the way through; it's only three chords but that song taught me it's not about how many you play but *how* you play them that counts."

You're a keen user of Burns guitars. How does that influence your rig?

"We've used my Burns Marquee on everything we've recorded so far. I've always loved the style of Burns guitars,

"THE HOPE OF PLAYING GREEN MAN AND END OF THE ROAD WAS THE REASON WE STARTED THIS BAND"

both aesthetically and sonically. You can't ask for much better when it comes to retro, surfy tones. It's the perfect fit for this band. I need to thank my mate Tom for finding it late one night on eBay. Apart from fixing the trem and adding a killswitch, it's the only guitar I've ever owned that I've not wanted to massively modify. Pedal-wise, I need my board to be as versatile as possible to fit the spectrum of styles we incorporate. There's a couple of reverbs: a Subdecay Super Spring Theory that's my always-on pedal, alongside a Boss Tera Echo for modulated decays. An EHX Electric Mistress handles all the chorus and flanger duties. Over lockdown I began building pedal kits and my first one is this bizarre tape-echo modulation station – it goes from standard slapback to ridiculous fuzzy pitch-shifting. Gain-wise, I've got an EQD Plumes for all things crunchy, and for the mad bits I use my trusty Devi Ever Godzilla – the only pedal I've bought twice, after my first one was nicked."

You worked with Buzzard Buzzard Buzzard's Tom Rees on your debut EP, *Blomonj*. What did he bring to your sound?

"Tom worked with us on three songs: *Mwydryn*, *Lucy's Odyssey* and *Rebecca*. We had such fun at his Rat Trap Studio. We more or less mixed the original single versions with him in the studio as we went along. It was a joy working with him, and the drum sound that he found was amazing. The main element was the energy he encouraged during the recordings. If you have seen him perform live with Buzzard Buzzard Buzzard, then you will know that no amount of Red Bull can create the natural energy that man has in abundance."

What song stands out most?

"We always enjoy closing our set with *Rebecca*. It's a song about the Rebecca Riots. It's part of Welsh folklore, when infuriated farmers smashed down toll gates dressed in women's clothes screaming the name Rebecca in the 19th century."

Your EP covers both traditional and modern Welsh life. How do you strike that balance and make it resonate with a contemporary audience?

"I think the traditional Welsh life songs you refer to, such as the story behind *Rebecca*, contain themes we can unfortunately relate to today. The rich crapping on the poor is a theme that is unlikely to disappear anytime soon, so we'll keep on singing about it."

How has signing to Sheffield's Bingo Records impacted things for the band?

"We love being part of the Bingo family. We're lucky enough to be on the label next to some fantastic bands. We were due to play an all-day event in Margate a few months ago called Bingo Breakout but Covid restrictions put an end to that. We're looking forward to doing that at a later date. Without them we wouldn't have the excitement of our first EP coming out on a pink vinyl!"

You recently played Green Man, End of the Road, and a support slot with Liz Lawrence. What's the response been so far?

"Oh, the hope of one day playing at Green Man and End of the Road was the reason we started this band. Playing Green Man was one of the most thrilling and surreal experiences of my life. It was packed – one guy climbed a tree to be able to see us. We loved playing End of the Road on the Tipi Stage, alongside some fantastic bands."

What's next for Melin Melyn?

"After End of the Road and the support for Liz Lawrence, we played at FOCUS Wales in Wrexham and Swn Festival in Cardiff. We're currently in talks to put on a Melin Melyn show in London, so look out for that!"

***Blomonj* is out now on Bingo Records**

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

DAVY KNOWLES
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

On his fourth studio album proper and first for Mascot Records, Knowles doubles down on his newfound aggressive approach to guitar tones, while focusing on the importance of restraint

An esteemed player whose blues pedigree belies his age, Davy Knowles rose to prominence as part of the Isle of Man power trio Back Door Slam, earning widespread acclaim and performing on numerous US TV shows such as *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* and *Good Morning America*. He followed these early successes by sharing stages with the likes of Peter Frampton, Joe Bonamassa and Sonny Landreth – and it's not just his heroes that he's played for. In 2010, he became the first musician in history to play live directly to the International Space Station from Mission Control Center in Houston.

On *What Happens Next*, his first for Mascot Records, produced by Eric Corne (John Mayall, Joe Walsh, Bonamassa), Knowles reimagines his playing, showcasing more aggressive tones and focusing on both melody and restraint. Here, he discusses his favourite guitar parts on the record.

LIGHT OF THE MOON

"This song was heavily influenced by Tony McPhee and The Groundhogs. I love all of their albums but *Split* is my favourite. They're such an underrated band. This album is somewhat of a change in direction for me. With this track, I wanted to emphasize that. The guitar is rattier, less polite and more fuzzed-out than I've done before. The album is more restrained guitar-wise than my previous ones, so I wanted to make any lead lines count and sound as big as we could make them. The rhythm tracks were all cut with my trusty PRS Vela, truly one of the most overlooked guitars out there. The lead was done on my producer's old Japanese-made Conrad thing. It had rusty strings, about 56 pickups and twice as many switches! I think all the sounds were through Eric's old 60s Bassman head and cab too. The fuzz came courtesy of a Vemuram Myriad, Josh Smith's signature pedal."

DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

"This tune started out as a much more straight blues-with-a-riff kind of song. I loved it in that style but we knew we wanted to bend it and shape it a little differently in the studio. Live, we can go between the two versions. I love them both. Eric and me had this idea of shrinking the song all the way down in the middle, sucking all of the air out of it. We ended up doing this reverse guitar part, which morphs into a more traditional slide guitar solo. I couldn't be more pleased with how it turned out. The guitar again was my PRS Vela. I think the tremolo parts were done with an old Magnatone amp."

HELL TO PAY

"I've always been a huge fan of soul music but this was my first foray into writing in that style. Steve Cropper was in the back of my head the whole time, not that I can come close to his mastery. I used an old Epiphone Casino into a Fender Twin – we were aiming for that clean spank. Normally I'd solo with a little overdrive going on, something to cover up my mistakes. Switching that up made me take stock and choose my phrasing wisely. There's some great back and forth between me and Andrew Toombs (Hammond organ) on the outro. Sometimes in modern records, I feel like those kinds of human-interaction moments get cut out in favour of chasing clean perfection, but I love them."

WAKE ME UP WHEN THE NIGHTMARE'S OVER

"I had a punky Derek and the Dominoes feel in mind for this song, and Eric suggested throwing in this Leon Russell-style piano part. The sounds were my Vela again, into my signature Bludotone amplifier, which is just a monster. I'm a little proud of the way this song builds, and there was a temptation at the end to start soloing and go crazy but I'm really happy I held back and worked on more concise parts. It was another victory in practising restraint, which was a big goal of mine in recording this album."

IF I EVER MEET MY MAKER

"This is the one acoustic song on the album and it means a lot to me. It was written about and for, my father who passed away in 2015. He was a huge influence on my musical upbringing and was as supportive a parent as you could wish for. Guitar-wise, I used a 1950s Martin D-18 and, to add a little texture later on, we recorded my 1932 National Triolian just doing downstrokes on the chords, mixed nearly entirely wet and just tucked back behind the main acoustic part. I think it really added a haunting quality to the song."

What Happens Next is out now via Mascot Records

© Timothy M Schmidt

PLAYLIST

On our more personal, new-look Playlist page, the *Guitar* editorial team and contributors recommend the tracks that they've got on repeat right now

THE ORIELLES

Bobbi's Second World (Green Man Festival Sessions)

First heard on the Halifax quartet's disco-infused sophomore album *Disco Volador*, The Orielles recently performed bouncy single *Bobbi's Second World* for Green Man Festival's 2021 live sessions. This rendition features all the pomp and vibrancy of the album version, guitarist Henry Carlyle-Wade using his American Pro Jazzmaster to conjure raunchy Talking Heads-esque melodies that dance around a shifting, far-out bassline. The bass melody doesn't have the envelope filter that the album version does – but the song loses none of its buoyancy, and the addition of fairground carousel keys and the loose percussion ensures that this performance straddles the post-punk and funk divide.

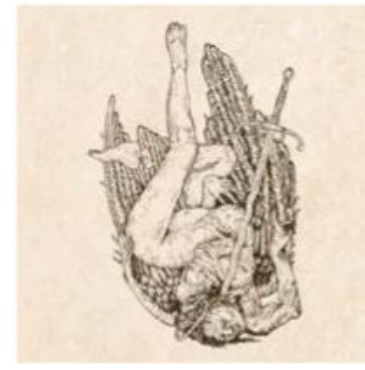
Sam Roberts, associate editor

SNAIL MAIL

Valentine

When I spoke to Lindsey Jordan this month (p24), she told me that she finds writing pop songs infinitely more difficult than penning acoustic ballads, which she, in her own words, "has a bin of". I'm not sure where euphoric rockers fit on her difficulty spectrum but *Valentine* is further evidence that the 22-year-old is a rare talent. Opening the track – as well as her new album – with haunting synths announces to the world that indie-rock's favourite teen guitar sensation has evolved. But when the overdriven guitar kicks in with its driving triplet rhythm, it's clear that the time since Snail Mail's 2018 debut has been well spent expanding and refining her musical horizons.

Josh Gardner, managing editor



SERMON OF FLAMES

Cauldrons Of Boiling Piss

Taken from their new record *I Have Seen The Light, And It Was Repulsive, Cauldrons Of Boiling Piss* sums up everything that's great about Sermon of Flames in just two-and-a-half minutes. The opening chord sounds like a hand grenade going off in a toilet – and things only get more intense from there, as blastbeats carve a path for a sudden complex groove that underpins a spiralling, disorienting riff. The vocals run from guttural gargles to banshee shrieks before the mix collapses into a wall of harsh noise. The track marries technical, deliberate unpleasantness with chaotic terror. Listening to it is like watching *The Shining* while being beaten to death with a hammer.

Cillian Breathnach, staff writer

CHURCH GIRLS

Vacation

Hailing from the indie-punk proving grounds of Philadelphia, Church Girls fuse the gritty escapism of The Menzingers with the wordy sad sack triumphalism of The Hold Steady. But songwriter Mariel Beaumont and guitarist Mitchell Layton also have eyes for Midwest emo's knotty leads of. That combination continues to work wonders for them on new LP *Still Blooms*, on which this track is a standout. Beaumont's crisp melodies are offset by Jawbreaker-style drive and coiled leads that unfurl during the chorus. "Breathing in and out's like a small vacation," sings Beaumont. You'll want to punch the air in celebration of taking a moment for yourself.

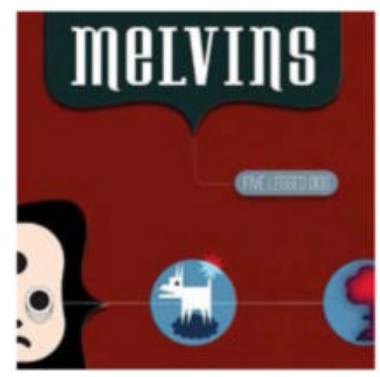
Huw Baines, writer

SPIRITBOX

Hurt You

Everybody in the world of rock and metal is talking about Spiritbox. Given that their eclectic, cathartic debut album *Eternal Blue* utterly slaps (for want of a more technical term), that's for good reason. The nu-metal-inspired *Hurt You* is one of the LP's standouts, with some of the year's meatiest metalcore riffs and a phenomenal vocal performance from Courtney LaPlante, who's able to sound gorgeous one minute and demonic the next. Listen to it as the band intended, sandwiched between *Sun Killer* and the epic *Yellowjacket* (which features Architects' Sam Carter) on the album tracklist, and it only gets better. You'll have trouble trying to find a stronger three-track run than this one.

Emma Wilkes, writer

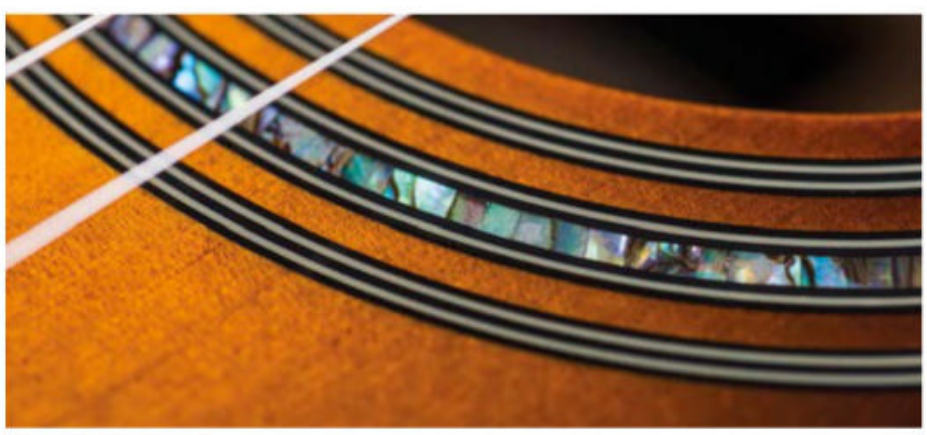


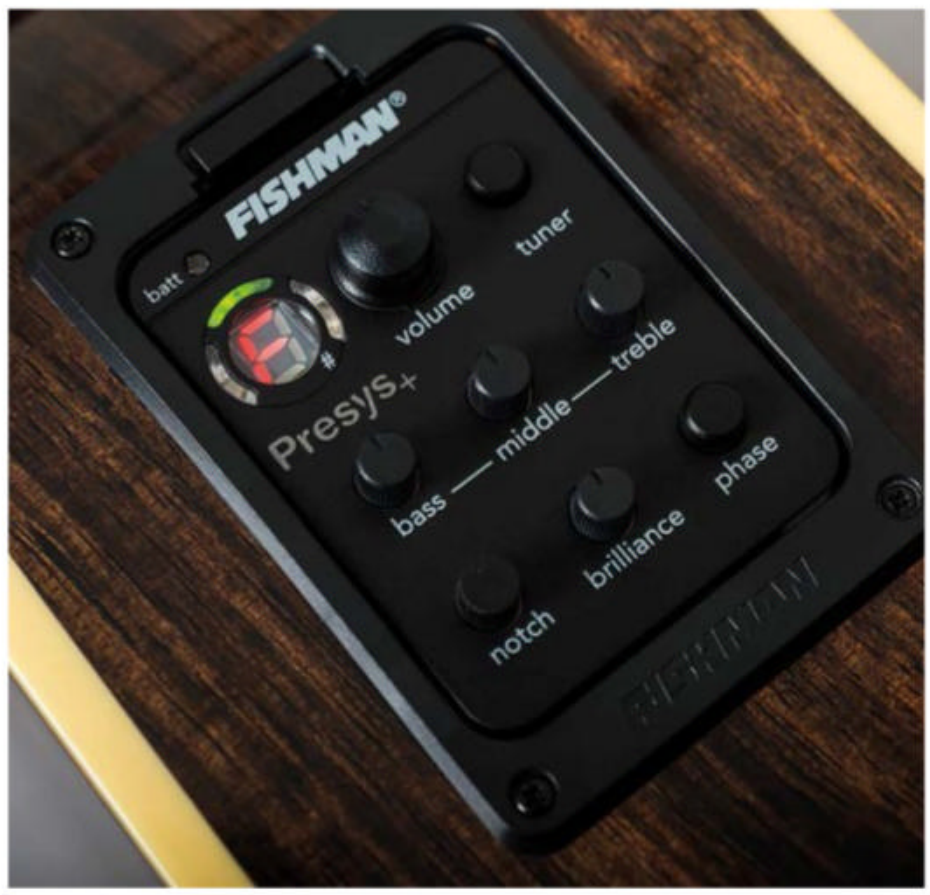
MELVINS

Boris

Melvins are no navel-gazers. Everyone's favourite sludge uncles have released little in the way of compilations throughout the course of their frighteningly productive 40-year career, which means the occasional act of looking backwards, as on mammoth new acoustic album *Five Legged Dog*, feels like a radical act in and of itself. Do not expect straightforward acoustic renditions of old songs here. Instead, Melvins fuck with their foundations to paint playful new pictures with old tools. *Boris*, a keystone of the drone metal genre taken from 1991 LP *Bullhead*, is ideally suited to such trickery, the track losing none of its elephantine lurch beneath Buzz Osborne's apoplectic, rattling strings.

Sean McGeady, production editor





WIN A D'ANGELICO EXCEL GRAMERCY WORTH £719

The New York brand's updated take on the grand auditorium model includes bold aesthetics and exotic woods – enter now to win this killer acoustic

D'Angelico's acoustic line was launched in 2015, and the Excel Gramercy is the company's suitably flamboyant take on the grand auditorium design. It features a solid Sitka spruce top with scalloped X-bracing, while the back and sides boast laminated Macassar ebony. The soundboard is decorated in a handsome Vintage Sunburst finish that contrasts nicely with D'Angelico's customary art deco headstock, as well as the gold hardware.

Based around a 25-inch scale length and a 4.74-inch body depth and Venetian cutaway, the Gramercy is lightweight and well balanced, sporting a comfortable 14-fret satin-finished mahogany neck with a slim C carve, plus a Fishman Presys+ active pickup, preamp and tuner system.

To enter, simply head to the link below and answer the following question. Good luck!

What year was D'Angelico Guitars founded?
A) 1922
B) 1932
C) 1832

Enter at guitar.com/competitions

Terms & Conditions

By entering this competition, you agree to the following terms and conditions:

The closing date is **23:59 GMT, 10 December 2021**. The Company's decision is final. This competition is open to the United Kingdom residents only. This competition is open to 18 years old and above only. For full terms and conditions, please go to **bnd.la/gm-ctos**.

PHOTO: Courtesy of Guns N' Roses

GRETSCH

OUTLAW ORIGINAL

GUNS N' ROSES
RICHARD FORTUS
SIGNATURE FALCON™

GRETSCHGUITARS.COM

©2021 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Gretsch® and Falcon™ are trademarks of Fred W. Gretsch Enterprises, Ltd. and used herein under license. Bigsby® is a registered trademark of Fender Musical Instruments Corporation.

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price
Cheap constant access to piping hot media
Protect your downloadings from Big brother
Safer, than torrent-trackers

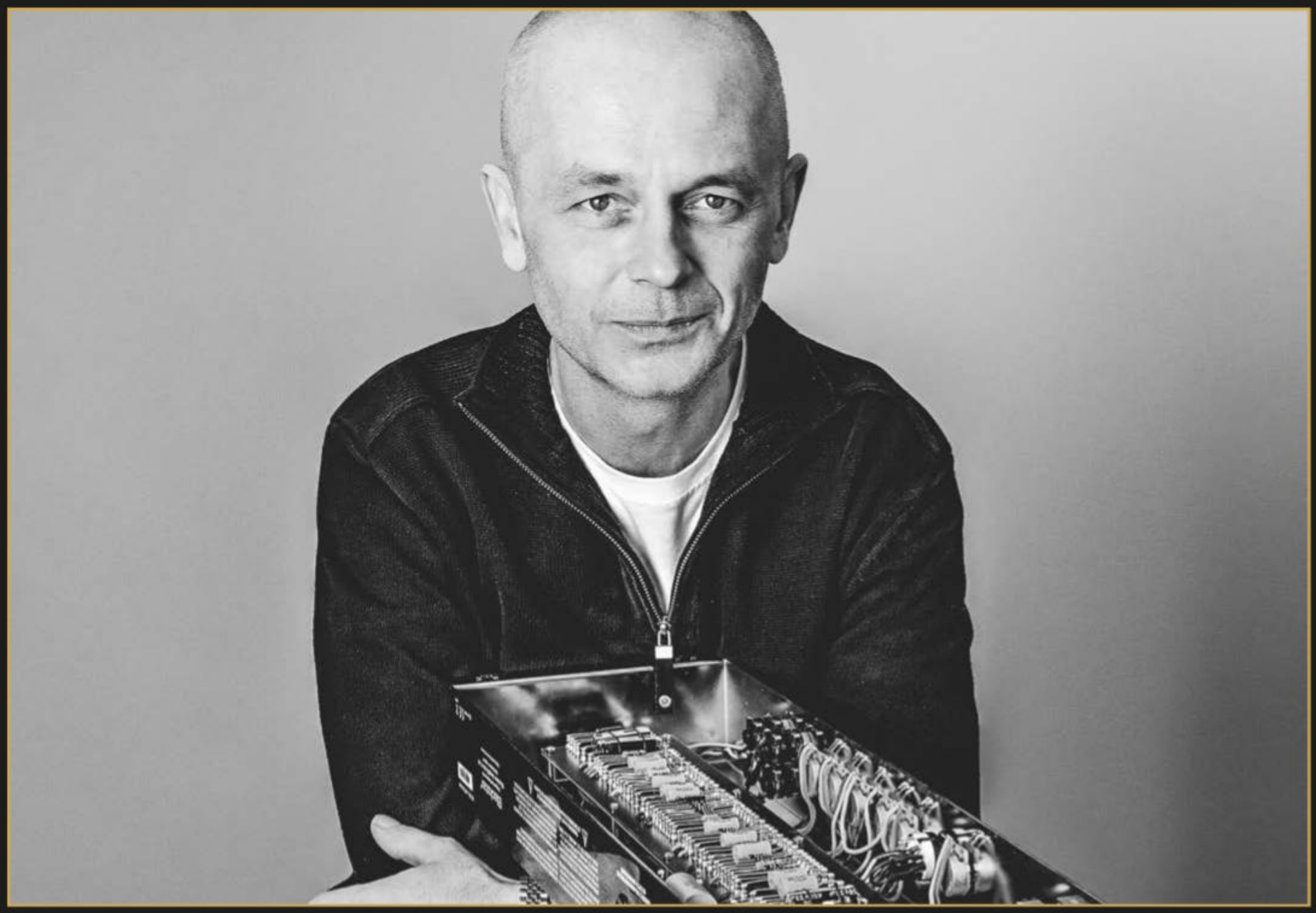
18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages
Brand new content
One site

AVXLIVE.ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open https://avxlive.icu



Bruce Keir

— 1961–2021 —

The *Guitar Magazine* team was saddened to hear of the death of Blackstar Amplification co-founder and technical mentor Bruce Keir, who passed away on 14 September 2021 following a long battle with early-onset Alzheimer's disease. He was 60.

Keir formed Blackstar in 2007, along with Ian Robinson, Paul Hayhoe and Richard Frost, and was responsible for designing the products that put Blackstar on the industry map. Bruce's long list of massively popular designs includes the award-winning Artisan amplifier series, the Series One and HT Pedals, and the original digital algorithms that became the ID:Series and formed the bedrock of Blackstar's current range of innovative digital modelling products.

Keir was born in 1961 in Singapore, the son of a BBC radio engineer. He grew up in a BBC World News relay station, his interest in electronics sparked by his environment and tinkering with discarded radio components.

After graduating from Salford University, Keir began work at Marshall. He started out as a design engineer before eventually becoming chief engineer and then design director. Over the 80s and 90s Keir would design many of the British amp institution's most popular valve and solid-state models.

At Marshall, he met Robinson, Hayhoe and Frost, with whom he formed Blackstar in 2007. Keir and Robinson would design those first Blackstar products together in Robinson's garden shed – within a decade, the company was one of the biggest names in the amp world, and boasted a world class guitar technology R&D facility at its Northampton HQ.

As Blackstar expanded, Keir continued to be heavily involved on the technical side, and was extremely generous with sharing his knowledge and has mentored many up-and-coming electronics engineers including Blackstar MD, Ian Robinson and technical director, Laurent Veignal

In a statement released in the wake of Keir's death, Blackstar released a statement that paid tribute to his impact, both professionally and personally, on the company he co-founded.

"As well as business partner and mentor, Bruce was also a very close friend and played bass in a band with the founding Blackstar team (including Marketing Director Joel Richardson) for years," the statement read.

"Over the years, Bruce has been an inspiration to many, many people and those who met him will remember the warmth, humour and gravitas of a truly unique individual. Blackstar will make sure his legacy is remembered, protected and strengthened."

Cliff Cooper, CEO and founder of fellow British amp brand Orange paid tribute to Keir saying, "We will always have the greatest respect for the innovative and creative work Bruce brought to the UK amplification industry. He will be greatly missed."

INTRODUCING THE NEW

META SERIES

MBM-1

Manson x Cort®

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

cortguitars.com/mbm-1 | mansonguitarworks.com | 440distribution.com

MAIL ORDER

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

When most of Lindsey Jordan's friends were heading off to college, she was in the midst of a rapid ascent to the upper echelons of indie-rock. Now as those same friends are getting ready to graduate, Snail Mail's second album is set to demonstrate the her growth as an artist in the years since her 2018 debut. We speak to the 22-year-old about Jazzmasters, her detail-oriented approach to songwriting, the pros and cons of spending your formative years on tour – and why she won't be bringing in a ghost writer any time soon

"It means independent, you know?" Lindsey Jordan has some thoughts on the current state of indie music. In the essay that accompanies Snail Mail's long-awaited second album *Valentine*, Jordan's friend, the artist Katie Crutchfield (AKA Waxahatchee), is at pains to point out that every one of the album's 10 songs was written by her alone, "in an era in which 'indie' music has been reduced to gentle, homogeneous pop composed mostly by ghost writers". And if you read that with a sharp intake of breath and a wince, you're not alone.

"It's just so strange to me that we're at a time of ghost writers and shit," says Jordan via Zoom from her cosy New York apartment, guitars balanced on stands in the space between the couch and the fridge. Her music might have a weary old-soul quality to it but Jordan is a bubbly and gregarious interviewee, her hands gesturing animatedly throughout.

"With the least shade intended possible," she continues, "I just take a lot of pride in the fact that I don't have any help. I feel like it's part of the genre. It's not my place to say what people should and shouldn't do. I just think that if you're gonna qualify it as indie, it should almost be a separate category: people that write their songs and people that don't. I think it's such a genre-defining difference, because it's the hardest part.

"It feels crazy to me, to be on an independent label or something if you're just performing the songs for an indie crowd – what, you're like a performer but not a writer, not an artist? I don't know, it just feels like why even take the job if you don't want to do half? If you call yourself a singer-songwriter, you might as well be a singer and a songwriter, you know? I take a lot of pride in the songwriting element of it, and that's why I like to do it."

ROAD WARRIOR

Still just 22 years old, Ellicott City, Maryland native Jordan was barely 17 when her 2016 EP *Habit* catapulted her into the indie-rock big time. A deal with Matador quickly followed, with her debut album *Lush* coming two years later. The word "prodigy" was being chucked around in no time, and the record would make year-end lists on *Pitchfork*, *Rolling Stone* and everything in between.

And then? Radio silence. Aside from a version of *Lush* track *Pristine* sung in 'Simlish' for the videogame *The Sims 4*, Jordan hasn't released any new music since 2018 – quite the thing in an industry that expects a regular drip-feed of new singles to populate playlists and keep young artists in the zeitgeist. Why? As her friends back home were finishing high school and heading to college, Snail Mail was relentlessly touring, which meant a limited amount of subject matter from which to pull new material.

"I didn't want to write the second record about tour," she says, "because it's just not relatable to anyone but me and my bandmates and other people on tour! I think it's like, a thing, y'know? You have success on your first album, then the second one is about tour. I was like, 'I don't wanna do that'. But that was all I had experienced for several years – not love, not heartbreak, nothing. Literally just tour. I don't want to be up here and my audience is looking up, you know? I want to be level with the people that I'm making music for."

She might have been short of relatable subject matter but the long months on the road all over the world at least gave Jordan the opportunity to hone other aspects of her craft.

"I just learnt a lot about myself as a musician," she says. "And you have such a long period of time to get inspired during your downtime – getting into new music and spending time with the fretboard,

© Gus Stewart / Getty Images

Lindsey Jordan, Jaguar in hand, at London's All Points East festival, 2019

"I'M A PERFECTIONIST TO A DEGREE THAT'S CLINICAL. IT SLOWS ME DOWN. BUT IT ALSO MAKES THE STUFF BETTER I THINK"

and seeing what it is that I like to include in my process and what it is that I don't. It's been a lot of personal growth and a lot of reflecting on why I'm doing this and stuff, and trying to ultimately get back to where I started, which is just making music, because I like doing it for my own sanity – it's like a journal."

Jordan took what inspiration she could from the snippets of normality that she experienced between tour stints. But then the pandemic hit, and Jordan left New York and headed back to that most normal of settings: her parents' home in Maryland.

"The time off in the pandemic actually really put me in a good place to write because I was spending so much time around my friends, who aren't in the entertainment industry, and my family, and just doing it from a very bored and organic place," she says, with a laugh. "I spent a lot of time adjusting from a place of being not relatable to the people around me to being like, 'Okay, what do we all have in common?' And realising that a lot of my friends were at a place emotionally that was more mature than me. So I was like, 'Fuck!' I had all of this understanding of how to talk in interviews, and how to sign things, write an album, how to tour and play a show, but not a lot of interpersonal experience from those really formative young adult years. So that was weird. And I learnt a lot during the time that I was spending with everyone."

VALENTINE DAYS

The result of this unplanned long-term immersion in normal life is *Valentine* – 10 tracks across which Jordan broadens the scope of her music, incorporating synths and programmed beats into the hooky indie recipe. It's an album that is undoubtedly worth the wait. Jordan has left no stone unturned in the quest to realise her vision.

"I'm a perfectionist to a degree that's clinical," she says. "It's not even a job-interview thing where I'm like, 'Well, my biggest flaw is that I just care too much'. It actually slows me down. But it also makes the stuff that I'm working on better, I think. I have a lot of confidence in my intuition in the studio and as a writer. Even with things where my confidence is lacking, I'm like, 'I don't feel I can do this consistently. I don't think I can do it quickly. But I *do* think I can do it well.' I trust myself in the studio to know when things are done. But I do think that whole process takes slowing down. And for me, the way that I see formatting lyrics and making melodies that are impactful is trial and error. That takes so long."

If *Valentine* is an album that sees Jordan widen the scope of her production, it also sees her having the confidence to strip it all back and let her classically trained acoustic chops come to the fore, as on the likes of *Light Blue* and *c et al*.

"I feel like I write a lot of those," she shrugs when we ask about these slower acoustic numbers. "I find they're just easier for me to write. There's three of them on this record, just because I felt the songs themselves were too good to cut. But I took some convincing. Brad [Cook, producer] really wanted to have those songs on the record and I was like, 'I don't know, I have like, a bin of these'. That fingerpicked ballad-style song just comes more naturally to me, so it's almost like I have to hold back the floodgates, because I'll just keep doing it.

"It was hard for me to be like, 'You know what, I'm going to write some pop ones'. I wanted to do that but they take a lot more effort. But the way that

"THE THING THAT'S REALLY MAGICAL ABOUT THIS MOMENT IN TIME IS THAT YOUNG KIDS ARE ABLE TO HAVE HEROES THAT ARE LIKE THEM. THERE'S SO MUCH MORE REPRESENTATION"

it naturally leans more ballad-y for me means I can take those and make them *really* good. Because I'm not going out on a limb to try to make a catchy one. So *c et al*, for example, I spent a year crafting that song, just because I liked spending time with it."

FRIDAY FEELING

That Jordan can churn out intricate fingerpicked ballads in her sleep is a testament to a lifetime spent learning guitar. Having started at just six years old, she took lessons until she was 18, including a period of learning with indie-rock institution Mary Timony. It was clearly time well spent, even if the inspiration for her life in guitar was a little leftfield

"*Freaky Friday* – oh my God, the soundtrack is so good," says Jordan of the 2003 Lindsay Lohan/Jamie Lee Curtis body-swap jaunt. "And I remember lots of media on the Disney Channel had guitar players in it. And I was like, 'This is so cool!' And whenever I saw a guitar player in a movie I was always like, 'Damn, I wish that was me!' And my conviction was so strong that I was just like, 'Alright, I'm just gonna make that become me'."

As a kid, Jordan always said she wanted to be a rock star. "But then growing up, I was like, 'Alright, fuck it, that's not realistic. Maybe I'll do something else. But I definitely want to play guitar.' And then by high school, I thought maybe I was gonna be a writer, and then I realised that it's definitely not gonna happen, so I'm gonna be an English teacher or something like that. And then it just happened really fast!"

Snail Mail was in many ways a happy accident. Jordan had no intention of being anything other than a guitar player until she started writing her own songs at about 13. At 15, she realised that she needed to get them out there.

"I wasn't a singer. I was just a guitar player for my whole life," she says. "Once I started writing songs, I was like, 'Who's gonna sing these? I guess me.' That's how I started – just to accommodate the fact that I wanted to play guitar. And now we're here – guitars, keyboards and all this. Who would have known?"

Jordan cites Nirvana, Oasis and Elliott Smith as the artists that inspired her to start making her own music. But just as important to those artists was her introduction to the DIY scene in Maryland and nearby Washington DC.

"There was a point where I discovered DIY shit and going to house shows – I think realising that was doable was a big thing," she says. "Then I formed a band and I was like, 'Cool we can just do that'. I was never like, 'Oh, let's take it from there to here'. But pretty quickly those shows were going really well, and people were reacting strongly to it. People in Baltimore and DC were pulling up to these little dive bars we were playing. The first tour we ever did, we were opening up for another pretty DIY band, and I remember that Jeff Mangum was one of the shows. And I remember just thinking, 'Well if Jeff Magnum is here, this must be going really well'."

OFFSET EXPECTATIONS

Jordan's first guitar was a three-quarter-sized red Squier Strat, but her guitar collection in the years since has blossomed to the point where she has various instruments stowed at her parents' house, at Snail Mail's rehearsal space near DC, and at her bandmates' houses. It speaks to a musician who isn't overly sentimental about her instrument but instead sees them more as tools for the job.

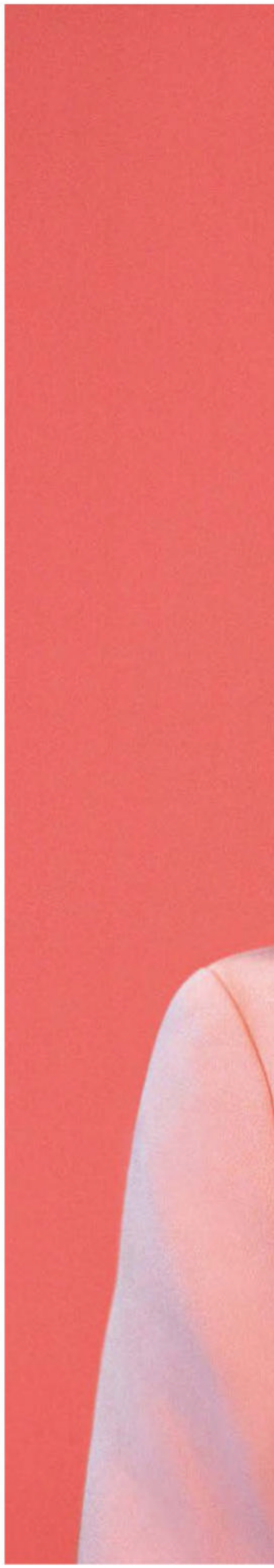
"Tools for the job," she repeats back to us, chuckling. "I think I could have gotten to the point where I was sentimental but I'm lucky in that I'm doing stuff with Fender, and so I have a collection that rotates a lot. There's a lot of diversity in this set tone-wise and in terms of specific needs, and so I'm doing a lot of rotating, and seeing what we need."

That doesn't necessarily mean that Jordan isn't extremely particular about her guitar sound though.

"I do like to get into the tone zone!" she says. "It's important to me but I have a lot of people around me that I enlist to help. My bandmates and I spend a lot of time dialling together. But they're more interested in it. At the end of the day I do care but they're better at getting from A to B, so I will be like, 'Let's work on this, all of us…' because I don't really have enough interest in it to get super-well-researched. It's the same in the studio. I feel like I'm okay but I'm sure the engineer knows a lot more and cares a lot more about tone, so I'll work with him on getting from A to B but I don't care enough to like, educate myself. There are so many other things that I care about!"

When it comes to instruments, Jordan's current primary guitars blend the vintage with the modern, her trusty '71 Gibson SG rubbing shoulders with a short-scale Fender Malibu acoustic, and an orange Jazzmaster that came to her out of the blue before quickly winning her heart.

"I got it kind of randomly," she says. "I've actually never had a Jazzmaster, and Fender just sent it to me. I don't really know what's good with it yet but it's really cool. I did a custom Jazmaster with Fender that was supposed to be my number-one. It took over



a year to make, and then they sent it to me and… it just never arrived. So they're making me another one. But for now I've got this other one now that they just sent to me – I don't know shit about it but it's somehow the best-sounding guitar I've ever played. I didn't know what to expect from it and I picked it up in a band practice just to test it out and I was like, 'What the fuck? It's awesome!'"

STYLE COUNCIL

With most of her life spent learning guitar in one form or another, it's no surprise that Jordan has confidence in her chops, and enjoys making music that might seem simple to untrained ear but is actually deceptively complex. It's a distinctive facet of Snail Mail's music that makes Jordan's guitar style difficult to imitate, though plenty have tried.

"Not to sound super-self-assured in that way but I definitely think that my guitar style is not as emulatable as it seems," she says. "I definitely think that some people are trying but I don't necessarily think they're doing the same thing. Saying that, Snail Mail and Soccer Mommy came out at a similar time, and I think that we're doing similar things that come from similar inspirations on guitar. Sophie [Allison] is not trying to emulate my style obviously but I think her stuff is coming from a similar inspiration, and so we do similar things at times. Like that song *Still Clean*, for example, we're messing around on the neck in a similar way and I'm like, 'Respect!'"

Snail Mail and Soccer Mommy are two of the most exciting and inspirational young talents in indie-rock today, but they're certainly not alone. From Julien Baker and Lucy Dacus, to Phoebe Bridgers and Mitski, many of the most important creative voices in indie-rock right now are women – and often queer women at that. It's a long-overdue change for an industry that has for too long struggled to reflect the diversity of its audience. And while there's still much work to do on that front, Jordan feels that the recent developments will have far-reaching impact.

"I think the thing that's really magical about this moment in time is that young kids are able to have heroes that are like them," she says. "There's so much more representation. It's obviously an uphill battle at all times, and it's still a thing that's growing and changing, but the thing to get excited about is the fact that it creates a pathway for more people to do it who maybe wouldn't have been able to before, and that's dope. I always think having that kind of representation is cool. I didn't have that, so it's cool to be a part of something like that. And it's nice to see the gates opening a little because it is such a gate-kept world – it's something to celebrate for sure."

Valentine is out now on Matador

Epiphone®

FOR EVERY STAGE

B.B. KING

Lucille

ADAM GRANDUCIEL
THE WAR ON DRUGS

THE *Guitar* INTERVIEW

WORDS GARY WALKER
PORTRAITS SHAWN BRACKBILL

Adam Granduciel has spent much of his career as the creative fulcrum of The War On Drugs – and shouldering all the pressure that comes with it. But with a Grammy win in the bag, the 42-year-old guitarist found the making of the band's fifth album an altogether more relaxed and collaborative experience. Here, we catch up with Granduciel ahead of the release of *I Don't Live Here Anymore* to talk gear, channelling his guitar heroes and finally embracing his pop sensibilities

Adam Granduciel had to start somewhere, so he started in Singapore. It was January 2018, and The War On Drugs were powering across the globe on their *A Deeper Understanding* tour, having won the Grammy for Best Rock Album with the most complete and electrifying record of their career. As he wandered the streets of an unfamiliar city, fresh ideas whirled around Granduciel's mind, a melody slowly crystallising. The song that emerged, *I Don't Wanna Wait*, sounds unlike anything his band have produced before. "I've been trying to write a song like that forever," he says.

From those unfamiliar beginnings, the band's fifth album, *I Don't Live Here Anymore*, took three years to complete, its gestation spread across seven studios in Los Angeles and New York. The War On Drugs' most collaborative and uplifting record to date is also their most accessible, Granduciel's guitar heroics coexisting with a multitude of analogue synths and exultant choruses draped in stonewashed denim. "I never really had a vision for it per se," says Granduciel, relaxed and genial on a late-summer morning in LA. "We started with the idea of having no rules and it being playful, and that was something I tried to incorporate into all the sessions."

It's been four years full of milestones for Granduciel since *A Deeper Understanding*. In early 2019 he turned 40 and, a few months later, he and his partner, *Breaking Bad* and *Jessica Jones* actor Krysten Ritter, welcomed their first child, Bruce – named partially after Springsteen. Perhaps these milestones gave him a different perspective. But as he contemplated the enormity of following up his faultless major-label debut, the pressure that has suffocated him in the past never materialised.

"I think I'm learning the arc of this stuff," he says. "When you finish making a record, you're so inside

of it, you've worked for three or four years, so the idea of not having any new songs is kind of daunting. Going into this one, I knew I had to keep working, keep writing and put the sessions together."

WRITERS RETREAT

The first of those sessions was a week-long retreat to upstate New York to work on *I Don't Wanna Wait* and a second new song, *Change*. With trusted foils Dave Hartley on bass and multi-instrumentalist Anthony LaMarca behind the kit, Granduciel plugged in his guitar with only a pinch of plate reverb for company.

"I wanted to show them the snippets I had and see if we could sit in a circle and hash up some of these ideas and see if there were any songs in there," he says. "We had a really productive five days. It was super-fun. There were no rules, no deadline and no expectation to finish it. It was really collaborative, throwing ideas at the wall."

The finished version of *I Don't Wanna Wait* is utterly arresting. The War On Drugs' slow-burn, widescreen Americana is immediately recognisable, and the spiralling majesty that Granduciel wrings from his 1969 Gibson SG is as stirring as anything that appeared on *A Deeper Understanding*. Yet it's many shades lighter too, Granduciel's playing joined by a cavalcade of shimmering synths and the most ostentatious pop chorus that The War On Drugs have ever committed to record.

"This band, three albums ago, were known because we didn't have choruses, now I enjoy that," says Granduciel. "I wasn't feeling so much this will be a big pop number, more like I wanted to exploit all the intertwining catchy melodies in the song. For a while, it was very moody, and then something happened when I started pushing the vocal a little more and it exploded. I was like, 'Oh man, I've never had a song like this'."

The War On Drugs (l-r): David Hartley, bass; Adam Granduciel, guitar, vocals; Jon Natchez, saxophone; Anthony LaMarca, guitar; Robbie Bennett, keyboards; Charlie Hall, drums

“IT SOUNDED WOODY AND SWEET. THE GUY WAS LIKE, ‘YOU KNOW JONI MITCHELL PLAYED THAT GUITAR...’ AND I WAS LIKE, ‘WHAT?!’”

With formative versions of two songs in the bag, sessions continued through the next two years, Granduciel and co-producer Shawn Everett convening to weave together the disparate threads delivered by the band. Joining Hartley and LaMarca were drummer Charlie Hall and saxophonist Jon Natchez, while James Elkington, Michael Bloch and Robbie Bennett all contributed guitar parts. The title track was first demoed by Granduciel in November 2019, becoming the well that the rest of the album drew from after Bennett added the chiming arpeggio earworm and Hall the huge reverb-drenched drum pattern. Vocalists Jess Wolfe and Holly Laessig of Brooklyn band Lucius pile in for an infectious chorus. You may even detect echoes of Don Henley’s 1984 hit *The Boys Of Summer*, John Waite’s *Missing You* from the same year, even Def Leppard circa 1987, and Granduciel peppers the lyrics with Bob Dylan references, recalling dancing to *Desolation Row* in Dylan’s audience at the Newport Folk Festival back in 2002.

“I sent it to Robbie,” says Granduciel. “It was like nine verses at the time, and he sent it back with the amazing arpeggio hook that he wrote on guitar. It was around Thanksgiving and I was walking into a shop to buy a roasting pan. I got the email from him and couldn’t believe it – it was immediately the perfect thing, a classic riff. I couldn’t believe he’d pulled that off.”

The song sounds massive but, Granduciel says, it’s practically a home recording, with studio drums. “When that song started coming together in early 2020, it felt like all of a sudden I had an album that could anchor the other songs,” he adds. “It’s obviously a poppier song but it felt very deliberate, and very honest and real for the band. It was exciting to have a song like that and it be so collaborative.”

HOUSE GUITAR

Granduciel used a mouth-watering spread of vintage electrics on *I Don’t Live Here Anymore*, including his natural-finish ’69 SG and ’62 Fender Jazzmaster, a ’64 Fender Jaguar, and a ’63 Strat borrowed from Tony Berg at Sound City in LA. The first guitar we hear, however, is an acoustic. The album’s lead single and opening track, *Living Proof*, begins in introspective fashion as Granduciel strums an early 60s Martin D-18. In the video, he’s carrying it through the golden wheat fields of Marin County, Northern California, where it once rested in the hands of another great North American songwriter.

ABOVE The War On Drugs playing at Grandoozy festival in Denver, Colorado, 2018

"It's beat up and looks really cool," he says. "The previous owner shaved the neck, so it's really skinny and doesn't sound like a classic Martin, it doesn't sound huge. I picked it up at the store and it was so comfortable and sounded really woody and sweet. The guy was like, 'You know Joni Mitchell played that guitar…' and I was like, 'What?!' The guy that owned it lived in Marin County and built a dulcimer that Joni used. He'd have these parties, and Joni came over a couple of times and played that guitar around the campfire. We shot the video for *Living Proof* where they lived, in Bolinas. I was like, 'Shit, that's where this guitar originally lived,' and I was coming back with it 50 years later."

Granduciel channels other legendary players on *I Don't Live Here Anymore* too. At Sound City, he felt the vibes of Neil Young, who recorded *After The Gold Rush* in Studio B. He also tracked at Electric Lady in Greenwich Village. The sound of a British guitar idol, emulated at Clay Blair's Boulevard Recording in Hollywood, is scattered across several of the album's songs too.

"I remember reading this article about Pete Townshend and how Joe Walsh gave him a '59 Fender Bassman and an early 60s Chet Atkins, and that ended up being the sound of *Who's Next*," says Granduciel. "You think he's just in there with his Hiwatt but he was given this combo by Joe Walsh and he ended up getting this wild feedback. Clay has a '59 Bassman and a Gretsch reissue of that Chet Atkins guitar, so I was trying to recreate that chain. I had the Bassman cranked and was finding these little pockets of tone. It was inspiration, the Pete Townshend sound. 'Let's see what I can add to my songs with that.'"

The subject of vintage amps has always been close to Granduciel's heart, and *I Don't Live Here Anymore* is positively overflowing with them.

"On *Living Proof*, I used two 50s Tweed Deluxes at Electro-Vox [in Hollywood]," he says. "I got a '53 Tweed Deluxe from a friend last year, which I used a lot towards the end of tracking. We re-amped a lot of the vocals on *Old Skin* through my '53 Tweed Deluxe and a bunch of stuff through a Roland JC120. I used a black[-panel] Princeton and the '59 Bassman at Clay's. One of my favourite amps I have is this old Gibson Discoverer with a 10-inch speaker. I love that amp and they call them Tweed-killers. I have a drip-edge Vibro Champ, a '68. It's like my SG, just one of those things I always record with."

© FilmMagic / Getty Images

FENDER

OUT OF THE HOLE

An infamous studio perfectionist who disappeared so far down the rabbit hole while mixing *A Deeper Understanding* that he was measuring tiny speaker cone vibrations, back in 2017 Granduciel told us that he prefers to compose his solos rather than drifting into unscripted noodling. The approach for this album was similar.

"I think I'm at the stage now where I try to refine parts on my own and then if something happens in the moment that feels real, it's worth keeping," he explains. "Sometimes you just hit on an idea and think, 'I'm gonna work on this a little bit and I wanna make sure what I put down is a little more thought-out'. But it changes song to song. *Living Proof* was fairly composed at home. That was a solo piano song for a while, and I had this moment where I figured out how I could incorporate a guitar. Some of them were more haphazard. *I Don't Wanna Wait*, the solo was from the original demo session, it was so loose that I kept it because I couldn't imagine what I'd do if I tried to compose something."

One of the album's most captivating solos comes on *Victim*, which finds Granduciel "a victim of my own desire… walking through the fields of glass". In the song's midst, the lavish sonic textures subside, leaving a motorik beat and sputtering explosions from the '69 SG that are simply lacerating.

"That was a [Crowther] Prunes & Custard pedal," he says. "I was playing my SG. The solo was an improvised moment, it wasn't worth over-thinking. I played that solo through a cranked amp and then took the session home and played it through the Prunes & Custard, going mono into a Moogerfooger Cluster Flux, so it has that width. I love the Crowther stuff, the Hotcake sounds best when everything is turned up to 10. A lot of the time when I'm recording, I'm trying to get a more simple sound. It's guitar, Hotcake, plate."

"FINISHING THIS ALBUM WAS QUITE THE FEAT, WITH EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENING. IT WAS A JOURNEY"

In years gone by, the image of The War On Drugs' troubled genius toiling away in solitude, forever in search of something unreachable, wasn't far from the truth. This time round, though, a brighter and more collaborative mood prevailed, and Granduciel is quick to recognise the contributions of the other guitarists on the record.

"Mike Bloch is a good friend and I love his guitar playing because he doesn't play like anybody else. He's a trained flamenco player, and he has a rhythmic thing when he plays electric, he's fearless. He comes up with melodies that are not immediately deliberate, it's like the melody is there but he's mostly playing within the chord and always finding this really beautiful melody, like in *Occasional Rain* where I credited him with playing the 'raindrop guitar'.

"Jim [Elkington] is an old friend. He's an amazing guitar player. I just like putting people together, and I try to get outside of the band element when we make records, just having people in the studio that we all love and respect and bring a different flavour. I'm good at certain things but I can't do it all and it's exciting for me to have all these other people playing guitar and giving me something to play off."

The love and respect that Granduciel has for this troupe of seasoned musicians is one of the reasons The War On Drugs are one of the most exhilarating live bands on the planet. In November, they'll return to the road for a 30-date tour of the US and Canada before European dates in the spring of 2022 and a lap of the UK's biggest stages, taking in London's 20,000-capacity O2 arena in April. While Granduciel's favoured guitars on the *Deeper Understanding* tour were his '65 Reissue Jazzmaster and a Gretsch White Falcon, he's planning to deploy some old favourites for these shows.

"I'm definitely going to tour with my '62 Jazzmaster. I also have this really cool Strat I bought from Jesse [Trbovich] in Kurt [Vile]'s band. It's a '57 Reissue that they made maybe 10 years ago, but didn't make that many. I just love the neck. I want to bring my SG because I need to use it for *Living Proof*. But it doesn't sound good through the Alembic stuff I use, because it's more of a single-coil thing, so I'm going to have a rig where I can hit a switch and play through a Tweed or another amp that sounds good with the humbuckers."

That's for the future. *I Don't Live Here Anymore* is an album, says Granduciel, about "movement, of pushing forward", but also casting an eye back at the road that brought him here. He hasn't yet begun contemplating where The War On Drugs' next record might take them. Rather, he's craving a return to the communal recording sessions of their first albums, 2008's *Wagonwheel Blues*, and 2011's *Slave Ambient*, with a new band headquarters in the San Fernando Valley in the pipeline. As Granduciel concludes wistfully on his new album's second track, *Harmonia's Dream*, "Sometimes forwards is the only way back".

"Finishing this album was quite the feat, with everything that's happening," he reflects. "It was a journey. Now I'm just programming my pedalboard, getting the show ready, trying to figure it all out, and I'm building a studio and rehearsal place for the band in Burbank. My only thing looking forward is to be able to have my own place where I can get back to creating music in the way that I was trying to do it years ago."

***I Don't Live Here Anymore* is out now on Atlantic Records**

MORNING GLORY

WORDS GARY WALKER

When My Morning Jacket finished their seventh album, *The Waterfall*, in 2015, bandleader Jim James was fried, tired, and wondered if the acclaimed, chameleonic rock band was done. Six years later, they return refreshed, inspired and producing some of their most interesting music yet. We chat to James and fellow guitarist Carl Broemel to talk 335s, how their chemistry is like a guitar Ouija board, and why they love the smell of burning amps in the morning

Both guitarists remember the moment as if it were yesterday. The connection so innate and immediate it felt as if fate had drawn them together. It was 2004 and My Morning Jacket were on the brink of dissolving after the departures of keyboardist Danny Cash and guitar player Johnny Quaid. Bandleader Jim James began the search for a new guitarist but no-one felt right – until Carl Broemel walked into the room. "It was so funny," says James. "Everyone else that came to the audition, there was no way in hell it would work. But Carl was absolutely perfect. It was divine intervention."

For Broemel, a classically trained player raised in Indiana, the story began months earlier. After a decade spent with bands that "got record deals, fell apart and ran their course", he found himself in Los Angeles "playing in a band to make money. It wasn't really a heart and soul-filling thing."

One night, driving through the City of Angels, listening to KCRW, Broemel heard a song that brought tears to his eyes. "It was what I now know is *I Will Sing You Songs* by My Morning Jacket, that beautiful guitar part," he says. "I remember thinking, 'I would do anything to play that versus what I do now'. Months later, I got called to the audition. I didn't have many of their songs, so started learning all the records, and then that song came on. I was like, 'Holy shit, this is the song I heard in the car'."

BOND BROTHERS

Broemel got the gig. Since then, the synergistic bond between he and James has strengthened with each album, the latest released after a four-year hiatus that almost spelled the band's end. Broemel's classical roots and James's visceral firepower hang in thrilling equilibrium across 11 stylistically diverse tracks that sound at once fresh and familiar. My Morning Jacket's eponymous return is a definitive history of one of the most vital American guitar bands of the past 20 years.

"Carl's fully schooled and knows how to read and talk about music in this very educated way that I don't," says James on the afternoon of a show in Portland, Oregon. "But he plays with such soul. Sometimes it's one or the other but Carl has the magic ability of having both worlds."

The admiration for Louisville, Kentucky-born James is mutual. "Jim's like a lightning rod in a way I can't be, maybe because the training's in the way or I'm thinking about what note I'm playing," says Broemel. "He just channels it, and I try to channel it too after being with him. Sometimes when we're playing, it's like a musical ouija board, where you can't figure out who's playing what."

After signing to major label ATO and making their commercial breakthrough with 2005's *Z*, by the release of seventh album *The Waterfall* in 2015 (a second batch of songs from the sessions was released as *The Waterfall II* in 2020), My Morning Jacket were exhausted. James wondered whether it was all over.

"I was so fried and tired of the rigmarole," he says. "We're lucky we've never had any drama and in-fighting but the stress of touring, not managing my schedule right and living too hard bit me and took me down a couple of times."

Time proved an effective healer. Within minutes of regrouping in August 2019 for shows to mark the 20th anniversary of debut album *The Tennessee Fire* at Colorado's Red Rocks Amphitheatre, it was clear that My Morning Jacket had more songs in them.

"It was beautiful, sweet and powerful," says James, who busied himself recording five solo albums in the intervening years. "It reminded me what the magic was and how out of balance things can get."

By November, the band were booked in to LA studio 64 Sound. James sought to free the sessions of pressure, asking his bandmates to bring minimal gear. "Once we started playing, it felt so good that we just started working on songs in a really fun, open way."

"It clicked pretty quick," adds Broemel, who released two solo albums and played on Strand Of Oaks' *Eraserland* during the break. "A lot of the time when you step into the studio, you have a release date or a producer with a schedule. We tried to eliminate all that and just go in fresh and see what happens."

BACK IN THE SADDLE

More sessions followed in February 2020, with the world teetering on the brink of a pandemic. Surprisingly, given the myriad tones that grace the album, both guitarists kept their setups simple. "I only used two [electric] guitars," says James. "One was a Telecaster that Chris Fleming at the Fender Custom Shop made me out of Home Depot plywood that we put a Fender neck on. That thing just rips. There's literally nothing in it but a humbucker in the bridge, no volume knobs, no anything, it weighs like 2lbs. I've also been working on a signature 335 with Gibson, and I have a prototype, it's beautiful. I've been having carpal-tunnel issues, so it's got a nice thin neck. I just wanted it to feel classic, like something a tree gave you, so natural that it almost disappears, it becomes part of you. I'm pinching myself that I'm getting to do a signature guitar, it's such a cool feeling."

My Morning Jacket (l-r): Bo Koster, keyboards; Tom Blankenship, bass; Jim James, guitar and vocals; Patrick Hallahan, drums; Carl Broemel, guitar

Alongside his number-one guitar, a Bigsby-equipped 1988 Les Paul Standard, Broemel deployed two rather contrasting weapons of choice. "My new favourite thing in the studio is a Silvertone U1 with the lipstick pickup. I used that and my Duesenberg Starplayer TV – a low-brow guitar and a real fancy guitar, going back and forth, whichever one works. The Duesenberg sounds like a Les Paul but a little more pristine, and the way it's built means I can rely on it. It's like a hammer and the Silvertone is like a brush."

When it came to amps, the heady aroma of cranked golden-era Fenders filled the studio. "I like old guitars that smell good and I like it when I walk into the amp closet and I can smell a vintage amp burning," says Broemel. "I had the guitars in the tape vault, where I could smell the old mouldy tapes and my amp was hot, that's where I want to be. I didn't like the amps that were in the studio, so I hit up a friend in LA and grabbed his late-60s Princeton and late-50s Tweed. For the next sessions, I brought my '68 black-panel Princeton and my '57 Tweed."

James was less selective, opting to use whatever he encountered at 64 Sound. "This incredible Fender Bassman head that went into this shitty 2x12 cabinet that didn't even have a logo, that thing sounded insane, it just blew up," he says. "I used a Fender reverb tank, an EarthQuaker Devices Ghost Echo and a Devi Ever fuzz for all my solos."

"WE'RE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT WORKS FOR US, VERSUS WHAT YOU'RE 'SUPPOSED TO DO', WHICH IS GO FUCKING FULL THROTTLE"

On *Least Expected*, Broemel's illusory finery hovers above the central acoustic rhythm as he uses an EBow to tease blissful sounds from his GFI pedal steel guitar. "I did two passes of the EBow that are harmonies through the Hudson Electronics Blackbird, that crazy sound that kind of floats like a saw. Other than that, I used real simple things – an Analog Man compressor, a Fulltone tape echo, a spring reverb tank and a POG."

All the while, the playing on *My Morning Jacket* crackles with expertly marshalled intensity, transcending traditional lead and rhythm paradigms: *Love Love Love*'s technicolour funk is threaded with a screaming fuzz solo; *Never In The Real World* is whipped up to a towering classic-rock coda; and the brooding seven-minute *In Color* becomes an expansive masterclass of audacious bends and lacerating one-note flurries before dissolving into a roiling fuzz-drenched tempest. The duo's intuitive interplay reaches a peak on the elegiac closer *I Never Could Get Enough*. What's most impressive is that most of the lead work on the album was improvised.

"I really like playing songs in a circle repetitively, taking a solo when the inspiration strikes," says James. "It's crazy how it works, it all comes out in that moment. It's just a beautiful ego-less exchange."

"It's pretty fluid," adds Broemel. "*Out Of Range*, those crazy stacked guitars at the end, that's all Jim. I was like, 'It's so pretty, I don't want to step on this,' and then he plugged in his guitar and ripped four different passes over the end of that song, and I was like, 'Wow!' It was so fun to watch, and it took no time at all."

ROAD DOGS

On the day of our interview, My Morning Jacket are eight dates into a US run that will stretch through autumn. The shows so far have been "incredible and healing" for James, and the band are learning how to tour in a way that, physically and emotionally, doesn't tear them apart.

"We're playing really well right now, I'm enjoying it more than ever," says Broemel. "I think we're trying to figure out what works for us, versus what you're 'supposed to do', which is go fucking full throttle the whole way. We've finally learned that it doesn't work for us."

"JIM LIKES TO TUNE A GUITAR REAL CRAZY AND WRITE. SO I'LL BE LIKE, 'THIS IS A GREAT SONG BUT NOW I NEED ANOTHER GUITAR'"

Joining them on the road are some 22 guitars, an indulgence that Broemel blames on his bandmate's penchant for unusual tunings. "Jim likes to tune a guitar real crazy and write a song and I'll be like, 'This is a great song but now I need another guitar'. The low string's down to C♯ and the A string's up to C♯, what are you going to do?

Broemel has 12 guitars on the tour but mostly plays his Duesenberg and his '88 Les Paul. "I have another Les Paul that I use for capo'd songs, and a Goldtop with P-90s. Jim just gave me one of the prototypes for his new 335 – it sounds amazing, really aggressive. I've got a TV Les Paul Junior, a Duesenberg Caribou in a special tuning, and the Telecaster that Fender made for me."

The guitarist uses a 3 Monkeys Grease Monkey head alongside his main amp, a Carr Slant 6V, which he says sounds like a beefed-up Princeton. "You can make it sound vintage, you can make it sound like ridiculous metal with pedals, and everything in between," he adds. "It's a blank slate, a super-solid amp."

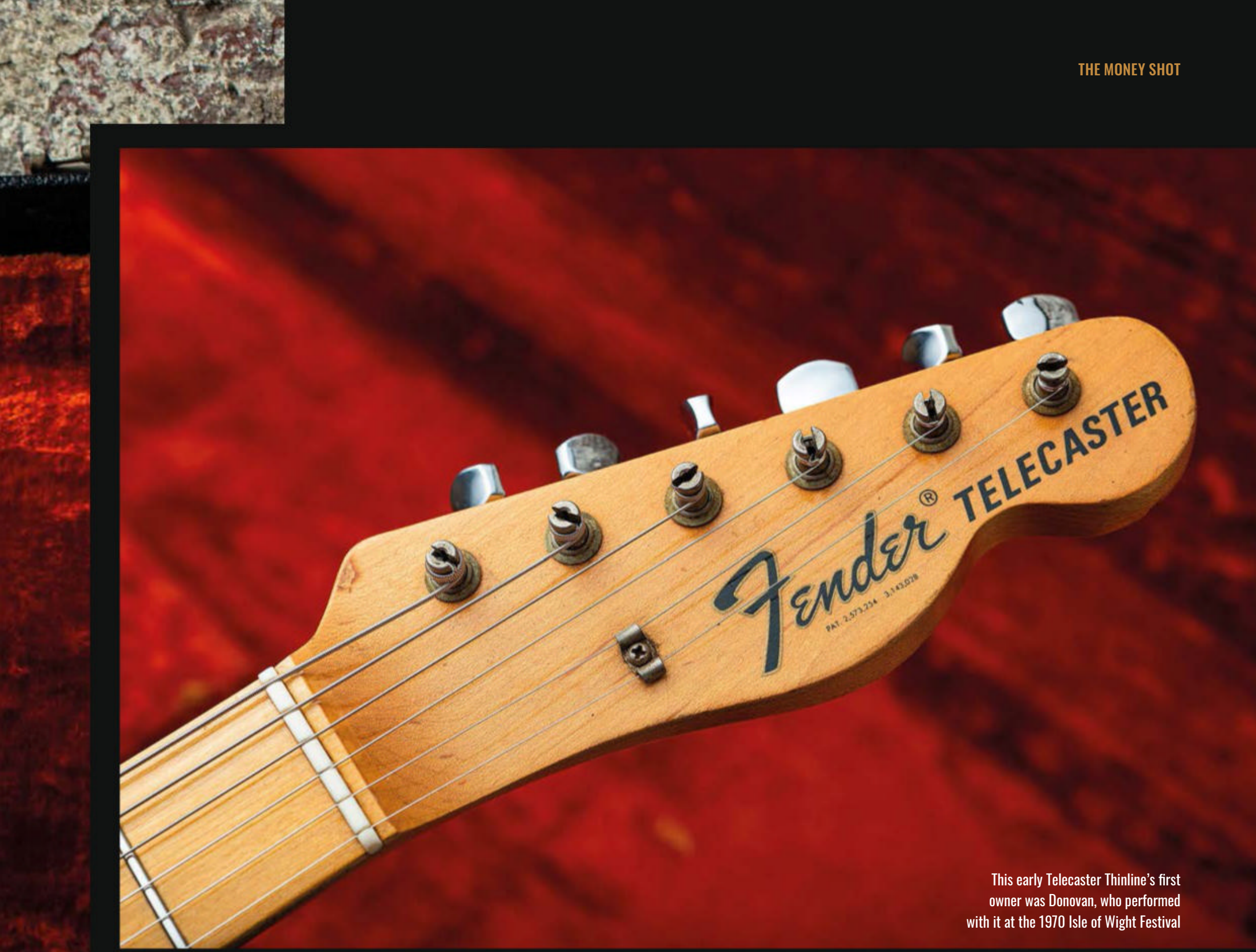
James estimates that he has 10 guitars on tour, running through his 3 Monkeys Orangutan and a pair of cabs. "I've been using my new 335, and I've got several other 335s, a 1962 Barney Kessel and a really cool guitar that Scott Baxendale rebuilt for me. I've got a Strat that Chris Fleming made for me. I'd always wanted a Strat with a Tele tray near the bridge pickup, and I fucking love that thing, it's just wild. The neck and middle pickup sound like a Strat but when you flip it to the bridge it sounds fantastic. I've never heard a Strat sound like that. But it doesn't sound like anything else either."

Despite the bleary-eyed effects of touring, the energy emanating from both guitarists is infectious. Having feared they had made their final album, My Morning Jacket's ninth feels all the more precious. The "weirdness" that's steered the band's journey and the enduring connection sparked at that LA audition 17 years ago look certain to extend into new chapters.

"Oh man, I just feel so excited about it," says James. "I feel so blessed we got to do another record. Every record, when you get to hold it, it's like another lifetime you got to live, another gift. Tomorrow is never promised. We never know how long we're gonna get and just the fact that we got another one makes me so happy. I'm really proud of it and I feel it fits in perfectly to the weirdness of the catalogue with all its weird brothers and sisters."

***My Morning Jacket* is out now on ATO Records**

FENDER



This early Telecaster Thinline's first owner was Donovan, who performed with it at the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival

THE MONEY SHOT

JOHNNY MARR & DONOVAN'S FENDER TELECASTER THINLINE

Few guitars have even one celebrity owner; this instrument has had two

PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

We've explored Netflix soundtrack composer Giles Palmer's vibey collection of vintage instruments in these pages before but when he recently acquired this storied Telecaster, we had to take a closer look.

Although Scottish folk icon Donovan is best known for acoustic picking, the second half of his set at the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival was in fact fully electric, and featured the Open Road band. Donovan's six-string of choice for what was perhaps the greatest British rock festival of all time – and his first-ever live electric guitar performance – was one of Fender's then-newfangled Telecaster Thinline models. The early example from late 1968 was later bought by Johnny Marr towards the end of his time in The Smiths, and it even made an appearance on *Top Of The Pops* when loaned to Bernard Sumner for New Order's performance of their 1989 single *Round & Round*.

"I wanted a Johnny Marr guitar for ages," says Giles, who purchased the guitar from Marr via vintage dealer Richard Henry. "The funny thing was it was sold as a Johnny Marr guitar and, almost as an afterthought, they said, 'Oh, it used to belong to Donovan'. It was a bit of a double whammy really, and it was great to find that out. For me, it's become more the Donovan Telecaster. If you are into that hippy, psychedelic era of music in the late 60s, Donovan's right up there."

With its attractive bookmatched back, substantial and supremely comfortable neck, and a beautiful balance that suits chiming arpeggios down to the ground, star connections or not, this is a tough guitar to put down. Unlike its previous owners, we don't imagine Giles will let this Telecaster slip through his fingers.

Follow @gilespalmermusic on Instagram and visit *Guitar.com* to see more of his collection

ENDER
PAT.NO.
DES.164287
2575194

HOW TO BUY A VINTAGE FENDER TELECASTER

Looking to add a vintage Telecaster or one of its many variants to your collection but don't know where to start? Let us be your guide

WORDS HUW PRICE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

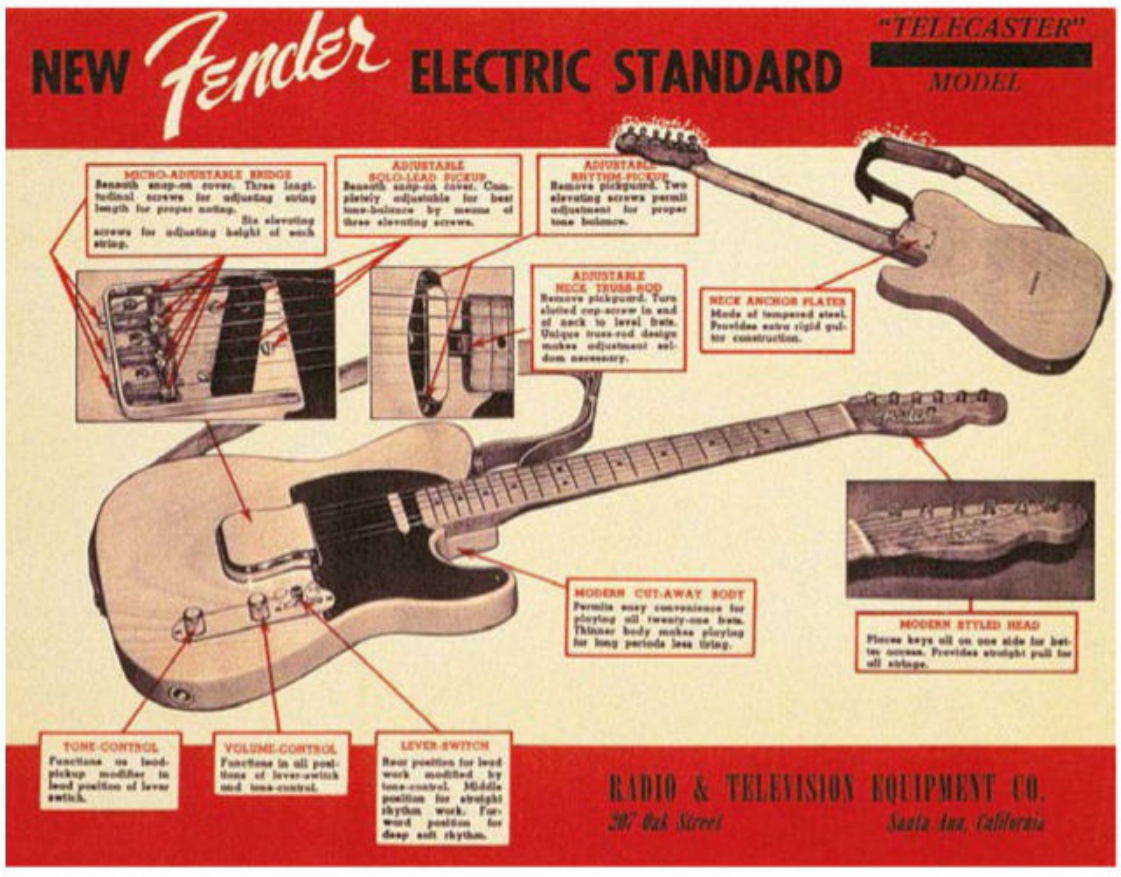
Leo Fender and his then business partner Doc Kauffman began discussing the idea of a solidbody Spanish guitar as early as 1943 but Leo only began working on the project at the start of 1949. The first prototype was a single-pickup model with a pair of knobs mounted on a rectangular metal plate and a two-piece laminated pine body. A curved metal plate covered the bridge while, decades later, the black pickguard would influence the design of other models in the Telecaster family, such as the Cabronita.

The most distinctive feature of Leo's early prototype design was the 'snakehead' headstock, with its three-per-side tuners. It's thought that this guitar was made during the summer of 1949 but many of the iconic Telecaster features were already present.

After sending the first prototype out for field testing, Fender developed a second, made during the autumn of 1949. Its three-saddle bridge, pickup mounting arrangement and through-body stringing would go on to make it to the production version. At this stage, the design still featured a single pickup but by now the headstock and tuner placement looked like the finished article.

FIRST PRODUCTION MODELS

Fender's first production guitars were made during the spring of 1950. Named Esquires, they had no truss rod and no string retainer on the headstock. The 1.5-inch-thick bodies were made from sandwiched pine and there was no router hump in the cutaway. Some were finished in black and had white fibreboard pickguards.



ABOVE An early Telecaster ad. These days, it's tough to imagine how revolutionary this newfangled design must have seemed

ABOVE TOP Early 1950s Broadcaster and Telecaster bridge pickups had polepieces that were flush with the top of the fibreboard

Another prototype is regarded as Fender's first two-pickup guitar. Leo hadn't designed a neck pickup, so he used a Champion lap steel pickup instead. Most first-batch Esquires had a single pickup but some had two.

The purchase of special tooling in October 1950 indicates that Leo was persuaded of the need for truss rods, and early truss-rod-equipped necks had walnut or maple headstock plugs. By then, Fender had started using ash for the bodies and Don Randall had devised a new name to differentiate the single and double pickup models. The Blackguard era had begun.

BLACKGUARDS

Blackguard is an umbrella term that covers early Esquires, Broadcasters, Nocasters and Telecasters. Why the name change? Gretsch had already used the name Broadkaster for a drum kit; Fender complied with Gretsch's request to desist. But rather than waste decals, Fender simply snipped off the Broadcaster section, leaving just the Fender logo – hence the nickname Nocaster. Blackguard aficionado Nacho Baños estimates that only about 250 Broadcasters were produced, and Nocasters lasted from February until around September 1951, when Telecaster decals first appeared.

The instruments' black pickguards were made from vulcanised fibreboard oversprayed with lacquer. The 'guards were placed on a tin for spraying, which left a circular mark on the rear. Other 1950 specs include closed-shell Kluson tuners with 'Pat. Applied' stamps on the side and rear, and flat-bottom 5/16-inch diameter saddles – mostly brass but sometimes steel. Look for milled jack cups and a 'Pat. Pend' stamp on the bridge plate, along with a serial number.

Baños highlights the distinctive shape on the neck's side edges that is only seen on Broadcasters and early Nocasters, and it's something we noted during our own Broadcaster encounter, with the instrument having the most sculpted and refined maple neck we had ever encountered on a 1950s Fender. In contrast, Fender struggled to drill the ferrule holes in a straight line.

Early pickups had flat alnico III polepieces and zinc-plated induction plates, and were wound with 43 gauge plain enamel wire. The bridge pickup wire changed to 42 gauge around the time of the Telecaster rebrand. The controls were volume and blend, with the muffled faux-bass tone in the front position, then neck and bridge.

You will see router template holes on the heel and under the D tuner on the neck, and there should also be two dowel holes on the back of the body, along with nail holes near the upper side of the neck pickup cavity, under the bridge and on the cutaway horn.

All bodies are ash and there should be no diagonal route between the neck pickup and control cavities on Broadcasters and early Nocasters. Instead, a hole was drilled from the truss-rod notch in the neck pocket to the bridge-pickup cavity. Although lightweight swamp ash is closely associated with 1950s Fenders, some early Blackguards can be quite heavy.

All the screws should be flatheads – including the truss-rod screw – up to late 1951, at which point Fender began using crossheads. The company didn't complete the transition until 1953. In 1951, Fender used 'transition' tuners with a closed casing and no Kluson Deluxe stamp or 'Pat. Applied' stamp on the side. These lasted until early 1952, when Fender changed to open-case, no-line Klusons with the rear 'Pat Applied' stamp, which stuck around until early 1957.

In late 1952, Fender changed from the blend circuit to an arrangement with a preset treble roll-off in the front position, the neck with a tone control connected in the middle, and the bridge with no control in the back position. The one-inch dot spacing at the 12th fret was increased by 1/8" in 1953 and the Blackguard era was almost over.

WHITEGUARDS

During the summer of 1954, Fender freshened up the Telecaster with a white ABS plastic pickguard and a lighter shade of finish that let more of the ash grain show through than the Blackguard's butterscotch had. Serial numbers began appearing on the neck plates rather than the bridge, and saddles were reduced in diameter by 1/16" to 1/4". The round switch tip was also phased out in favour of a top-hat design.

ABOVE This Blackguard belongs to English guitarist Eddie Tatton – head to *Guitar.com* to see more of his collection

The Stratocaster was introduced in 1954 with heavy formvar pickups. Telecaster pickup magnets changed to alnico V at about this time, and there are reports of very rare formvar-wound Tele pickups from this period. Changes continued in 1955, with the introduction of staggered magnets in the bridge pickup. Fender also produced a limited run of Sunburst Teles, and the body pencil dates moved from the neck pocket to the neck-pickup cavity.

In 1956, the 'butterfly' string retainer replaced the earlier round type, and the location shifted towards the nut. The headstock decal was relocated to the other side of the retainer and set at an upwards angle. Flat-top knobs with a soft knurl were another new feature.

A few more sunbursts were made in 1957, and the neck profile tended towards a pronounced V. We've steered away from generalising about neck profiles because they varied so much depending on who carved them but Fender necks became more standardised as the 1950s progressed.

TOP-LOADERS

In 1958, threaded steel saddles replaced the smooth ones and a slimmer D neck profile was introduced.

More significantly – and controversially – Fender changed to a top-loader bridge design. With string holes drilled at the rear fold of the bridge, Fender no longer had to drill holes through the body or install ferrules.

This has historically been viewed as a downgrade – but don't knock it if you haven't tried it. Top-loading Teles have their fans and we haven't noticed any negative impact on tone or sustain. Indeed, the playing feel gets a little slinkier. If you're not convinced that top-loader Teles are cool, listen to Jim Campilongo and some early Jimmy Page. Nevertheless, Fender abandoned top-loading in 1959 and reverted to through-body stringing.

ROSEWOOD & ALDER

Top-loaders spanned the period in which Fender made some other significant changes too. In mid-1959, Fender reconfigured its necks for rosewood 'boards. One-piece maple necks were a thing of the past and, while maple fretboards were still available to order, they were glued on in the same way as the rosewood slab 'boards.

Though it's difficult to pinpoint precisely when Fender began using alder for Telecaster bodies, it probably coincided with the introduction of custom-colour options. Ash remained the wood of choice for blonde finishes. The overwhelming majority of mid-late 1950s Teles were blonde, and ash would continue to be used throughout the 1960s and beyond.

CUSTOM TELECASTER & ESQUIRE

Fender used alder for sunburst Custom Telecaster and Esquire bodies on their introduction in June 1959. Maybe Fender was trying to achieve a more upmarket look with the Custom models, because the distinguishing feature is a single layer of white binding on the front and back of the body.

The decal was subtly altered too, with 'Custom Telecaster' in a pseudo-gothic font under the spaghetti logo. They were also fitted with green nitrate pickguards. Regular Teles retained single-ply white 'guards.

In the mid-1960s, Fender developed 'tuxedo' Custom Teles. There were two versions: a black body with white binding, and the reverse tuxedo – a white body with black binding. Fender continued making these models into the early 1970s but they are extremely rare.

ABOVE The headstock of Rory Gallagher's much-loved 1966 Telecaster, pictured on p52-53

OPPOSITE This Whiteguard Esquire belongs to Netflix composer Giles Palmer and was bought from ATB Guitars

OPPOSITE TOP Joe Bonamassa's modified 1951 Nocaster and '52 Tele. The latter was formerly owned by Terry Reid

ABOVE The Custom Telecaster added body binding to the recipe for a touch of aesthetic class

1960S STYLE

Throughout the 1960s, Custom features kept pace with the changes to regular Teles, acquiring white three-ply pickguards mid-decade and moving from the spaghetti logo to the transitional logo in 1964, and then the black block logo by '68. Other changes that occurred throughout the Telecaster line included a new white Chiclet tone capacitor in 1959, and the introduction of ceramic caps in 1961. Patent numbers and a DES number were also added to the decal that year.

Veneer rosewood 'boards replaced slabs in 1962 and pearloid dots replaced the 'clay' type in 1964. In 1967, F-stamped tuners replaced the double-line Klusons that Fender had begun fitting around the time of the CBS takeover.

Fender introduced grey fibre pickup bases in 1964 but persisted with the 1950s wiring scheme until late 1967, when they finally adopted the neck/both/bridge with shared volume and tone controls that most Tele players had preferred all along. They added a 0.001uF treble-bleed capacitor to the volume control too.

In 1969, Fender replaced the 250k potentiometers with 1M, and some pickups were potted in lacquer rather than wax. These factors can combine to make Teles of this era shriller and prone to squealing.

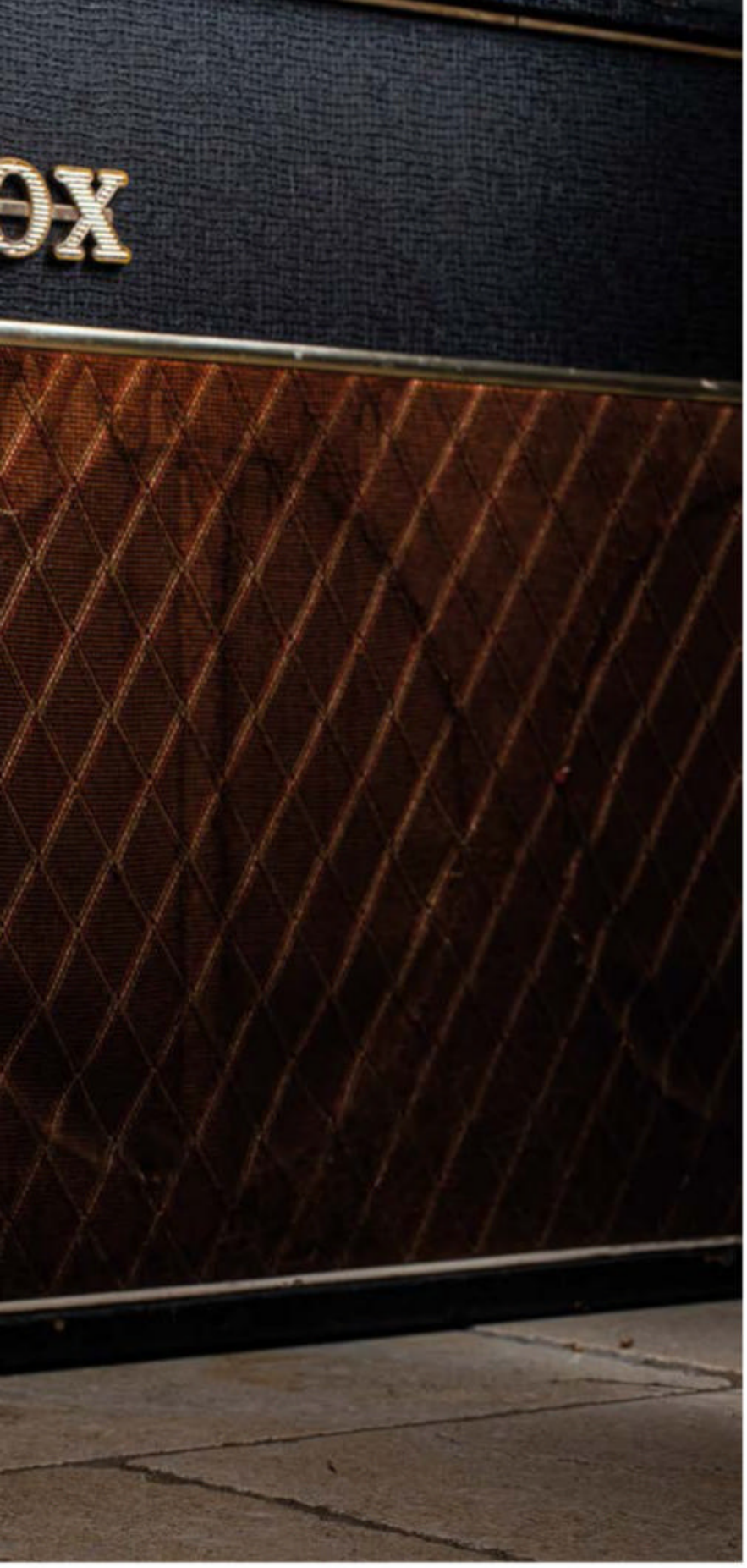
WEIGHT RELIEF

With the exception of some early Blackguards, Telecasters of the vintage era usually had fairly light bodies. Perhaps, much like today, lightweight ash was becoming harder to source in sufficient quantities, because in about 1967 Fender briefly experimented with weight-reducing routs under the pickguard. These guitars are known as Smuggler's Teles because the routs provided the potential for stash concealment. It was the 1960s, after all…

Fender's design guru Roger Rossmeisl came up with a more effective way of using heavy wood. By routing mahogany bodies from the back to remove most of the wood, and then glueing a cap over the chambers, Rossmeisl effectively created a semi-solid Telecaster.

The Telecaster Thinline debuted in late 1968 and also featured a redesigned pickguard, slanted controls and an f-hole on the bass side. Regular Tele pickups were installed until late 1971, at which point Thinlines acquired the Seth Lover-designed Wide Range humbuckers.

Although not officially designated a Thinline, the Rossmeisl-designed rosewood-bodied Telecasters were constructed in pretty much the same way.

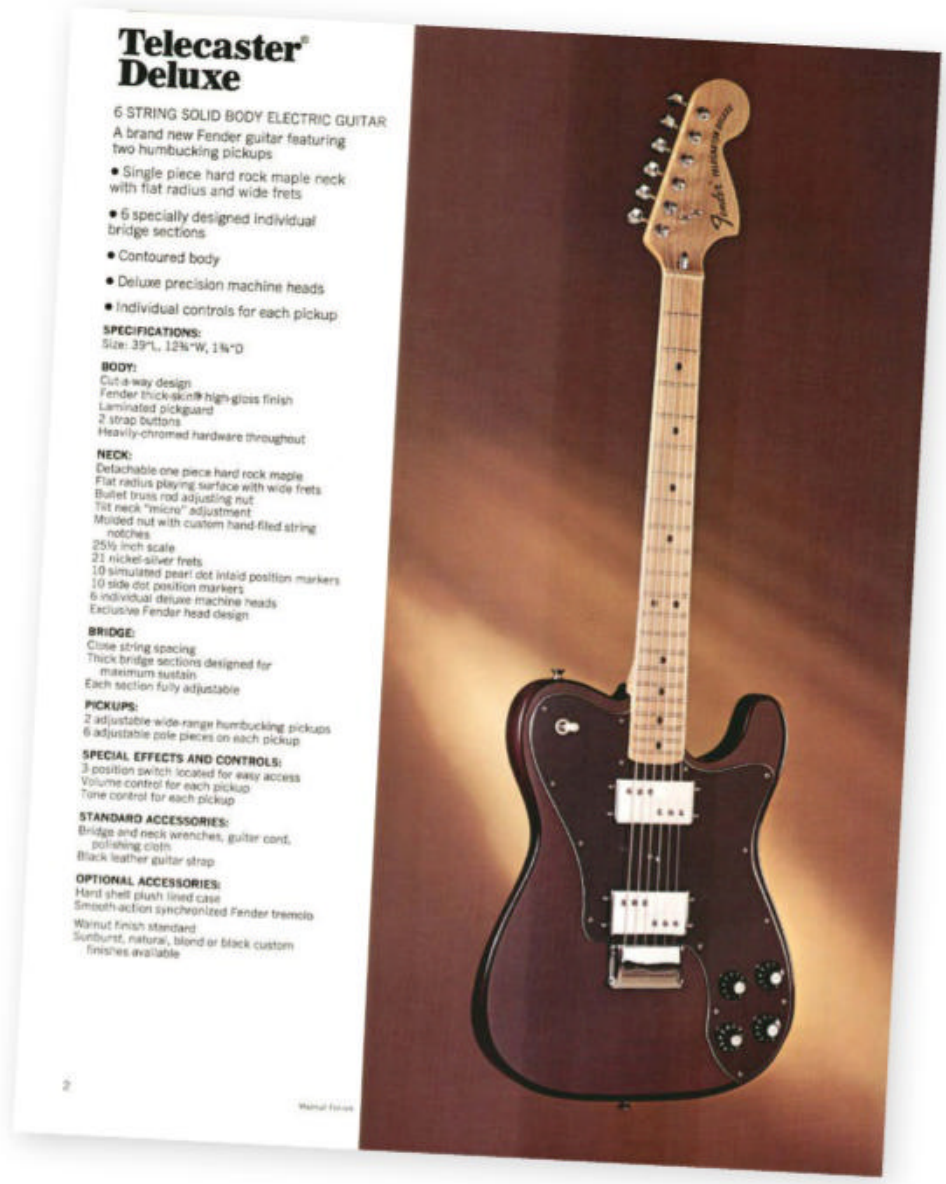


The differences are that they have no f-hole and rosewood sandwich bodies with a thin maple filling. Fender only made these for a couple of years from 1969 onwards, and it should be noted that the rosewood Telecaster prototype George Harrison played with The Beatles was completely solid.

FLOWER POWER

Two of the most unusual-looking Telecasters of the vintage era were the Paisley and Blue Flower models. Despite their wild appearance, they were in fact stock Teles with striking finishes that were created by covering their alder bodies – front and back – with patterned wallpaper. Fender then sprayed metallic pink or blue around the edges to create a sunburst-style effect before sealing everything in with clear gloss lacquer. Clear pickguards were used to allow the wallpaper to show through, and some additional metallic lacquer was sprayed on the underside, around the neck pickup cutout, to conceal the cavity.

Few were made between 1968 and 1969 and, since this method of finishing was not particularly robust, vintage examples in good condition remain difficult to find. The Blue Flower version is the rarest, and



the most famous Paisley player is James Burton, who used his with Elvis. Over the years, Fender has offered various reissues of both iterations.

ABOVE The Telecaster Deluxe debuted in the 1972 Fender catalogue and later became popular with indie guitarists

HUMBUCKER MODELS

Tele neck pickups don't suit everybody, and replacing them with a humbucker was one of the earliest and most popular Telecaster modifications. Fender eventually cottoned on but, since Gibson wasn't about to start selling humbuckers to their main rival, the Californian company had to develop its own.

CBS made countless mistakes but asking PAF inventor Seth Lover to create a Fender humbucker was not one of them. His powerful Wide Range humbucker retained much of Fender's brighter tonal signature and featured offset magnetic pole screws made from CuNiFe alloy.

The pickup first featured in the double-humbucker Telecaster Thinline in 1971, followed by the Custom of 1972, in combination with a regular Tele bridge pickup. The Telecaster Custom is most closely associated with Keith Richards and, in black, it's a bona fide icon.

Various other colours were available and, as vintage Telecasters go, they're still relatively affordable. If you can find a lightweight example – and they do exist – they're also versatile and superb-sounding guitars.

Fender's attempt to take on Gibson at its own game was the Telecaster Deluxe of 1972, which featured two Wide Range humbuckers, a solid body, fatter frets and a Les Paul-style control layout. A hardtail Strat bridge was used along with a Strat-style neck. Initial sales were disappointing but they've enjoyed a resurgence in recent years and are particularly popular in indie circles. However, with micro-tilt necks and bullet truss rods firmly established, the first golden era of Telecasters had drawn to a close.

THE COLLECTION

ROCKS OFF

WORDS ED OLESZKO
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Collector Simon White owns some formidable instruments but the pinnacle is surely the Les Paul Standard used by Keith Richards and Mick Taylor on The Rolling Stones' legendary 1972 album *Exile On Main St.* Read on as we check out the highlights of his collection and see more of this incredible Burst

'59 GIBSON S/B LES PAUL

ABOVE Simon White cradling his sublime 1959 ES-5 Switchmaster

OPPOSITE Simon's blonde Strat has a neck date of March 1956. Despite being less than six months younger than his sunburst 1955 Strat, it showcases the evolution of the design during the mid-50s. His tweed Deluxe is in fantastic original condition too, as is his black-panel 60s Twin Reverb

With an eye-watering guitar and amp collection equally matched by our host's generous hospitality and the small matter of a 1959 Les Paul Standard used on one of the greatest rock 'n' roll albums of all time, we wish we could be forced into exile on Simon White's street. But far from being merely a collector of vintage instruments, northerner Simon White's career highlights include being a member of one of the most unique UK bands of the 1970s. "I was in a band called Alberto y Lost Trios Paranoias," he says. "We used to have a lot of fun onstage. We took the music seriously but didn't take ourselves seriously at all."

The Manchester outfit were a joyously eccentric group who ruthlessly parodied the musical acts of the time, blending uniquely British comedy with spectacular musical ability that often surpassed the acts that they were paying 'tribute' to. Audiences the length of the country left equally enthralled, entertained and bemused by their live shows. During the 1970s they not only opened for Hawkwind but also topped the bill on numerous tours and were supported by acts such as Blondie, The Stranglers and The Police.

Alongside other Stiff Records artists such as Ian Dury, Nick Lowe and Elvis Costello, the Albertos were fan favourites on the Stiffs tours of the late 70s. The band even reached number 47 in the UK singles chart in 1978 with their Status Quo spoof *Heads Down, No-Nonsense Mindless Boogie*. But it wasn't to last. "Unfortunately, we lost Les Prior, one of our vocalists, to leukaemia in 1980, leaving an unfillable void in the band," says Simon. "It was very sad. We eventually went our own ways through musical indifference."

With the band breaking up in 1982, Simon went on to have a career in film and TV special effects. His impressive credits include *Fantastic Mr Fox*, *Frankenweenie* and a forthcoming *Pinocchio* remake.

Fender Deluxe
FULLERTON CALIFORNIA
Twin Reverb-Amp
NORMAL
VIBRATO
VOLUME
TREBLE
MIDDLE
BASS
SPEED
INTENSITY
FENDER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
JAZZ CHORUS-5
DAKOTA RED P BASS

NORMAL
VIBRATO
VOLUME
TREBLE
BASS
Super Reverb-Amp

But he always had guitars around, some from his touring days and others heading in and out of his collection as he chopped and changed over the years.

LET IT LOOSE

With such a spectacular array of instruments in front of us, it's tough to know where to begin. "Well, how about this beautiful ES-330 TDN I got a little while back?" Simon suggests. "I had another red one, which was lovely, but since seeing Dave Edmunds with his blonde ES-335 years ago, I've always kept an eye out for a nice blonde ES series guitar. This one came up at ATB Guitars and I traded in my red one. It's a spectacular looking and sounding guitar."

Another blonde that catches our eye is Simon's 1954 ES-175. "That was in a bit of a state when I got it," he admits. "It had a few cracks and the neck P-90 pickup was a clear bobbin, so probably a mid-1960s replacement. It's a spectacular-sounding guitar now that I've got it all sorted out. The pickups were out of phase when I got it and I wanted it to stay that way, as I just love the middle position. It's perfect for that Peter Green tone."

Nestled next to the ES-175 is another stunning Gibson. "That's my 1959 ES-5 Switchmaster" says Simon. "It's just an incredible-sounding thing. Just look at the flame on the back and the precision of the stinger on the back of the headstock. The craftsmanship back at Gibson in those days was just incredible. I'm also in the middle of sorting out a deal for a blonde ES-5 that might well have belonged to Chet Atkins himself. But that'll have to wait for another visit as I don't have it yet!"

Next up is a further pair of impressive ES models. "My 1961 Cherry ES-335 TDC has seen some action over the years," says Simon. "It has a wonderfully slim neck, which I don't always like but that guitar is so beautifully easy to play you don't notice.

ABOVE Simon's baritone Tele and vintage Fender Bass VI handle low-end duties

OPPOSITE Simon's white Strat boasts all-original parts and an early veneer board from late 1962. Despite seeing a lot of action and refinishes, his Sonic Blue slab-'board '62 Strat is a great player too

Marshall

The sunburst ES-345 TD is from 1964 and is another lovely instrument. It's pretty much all original and the Varitone is lots of fun to play with."

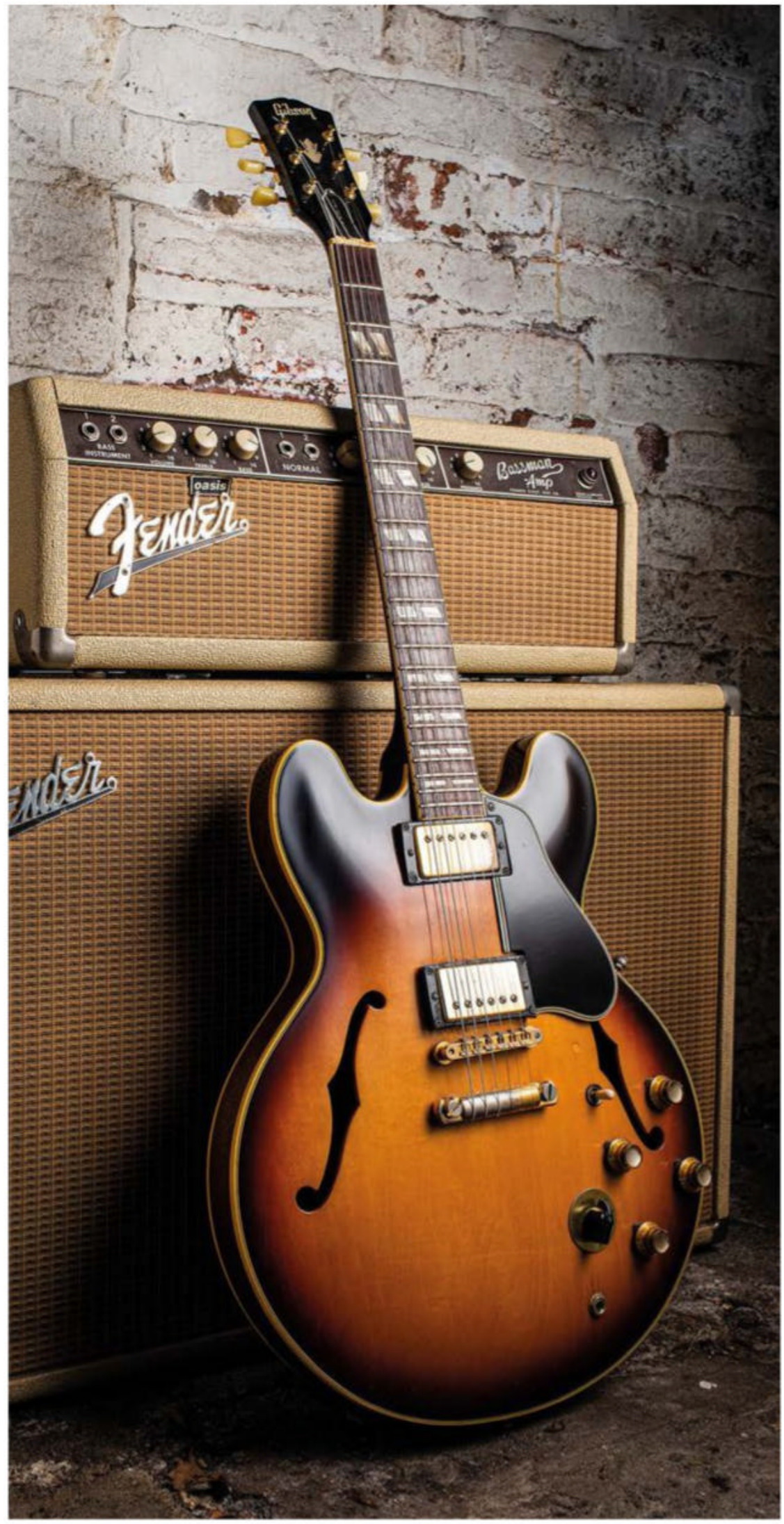
SHINE A LIGHT

We spend some time with a few of Simon's other guitars, notably a gorgeous 1962 Fiesta Red Fender Bass VI, whose deep evocative twang through his 1960s Super Reverb is pure spaghetti-western soundtrack material. Then we turn our attention to a couple of beautiful 1950s Stratocasters.

"This sunburst is from November 1955, the blonde one is from March 1956," notes Simon, placing these guitars at a significant precipice of 1950s Stratocaster design evolution. "It's incredible. They are only about six months apart in age yet are very different in terms of parts and construction. The sunburst has all the early parts, the blonde has the later plastics that would pretty much define Strats into the late 60s."

Speaking of the 1960s Stratocaster development curve, Simon's other main Strats are both from 1962, and exemplify another significant leap in Stratocaster evolution. "The Sonic Blue one is a refinish, which I bought for £60 back in the day," he says. "It has a slab 'board and is a February 1962 neck date. The white one is all original and is a November 1962. That has the veneer board. Again, this pair are only about six months apart, yet are hugely different."

As we delve deeper into Simon's collection, a pair of brown Lifton cases pique our curiosity. Inside the first is a 1956 Goldtop. "I just love the ageing and the way it has gone green on the top," says Simon.



As beautiful as that guitar is, it's eclipsed by the next one. Opening the second Lifton case reveals a six-string that's not just the jewel of this collection but an instrument that would likely be the centrepiece of any collection, anywhere: the *Exile On Main St.* Burst.

TORN AND FRAYED

Formerly owned by Keith Richards, this '59 Les Paul was purchased by the Stones legend in 1971. It was used by both Keith and Mick Taylor for overdubs on *Exile On Main St.* during sessions at Sunset Sound in Los Angeles, and on the Stones' subsequent tour.

OPPOSITE TOP White's well-played 1961 ES-335 sits alongside a vintage 18-watt Marshall

OPPOSITE BOTTOM A stunning 1954 ES-175

ABOVE Simon's sunburst '64 ES-345 with his blonde '61 Bassman, bought from a neighbour: Bonehead of Oasis

ABOVE Simon's 1961 Gibson Les Paul – later known as an SG, of course

RIGHT This 1955 Fender Stratocaster sports early-spec parts

As well as appearing in numerous photographs during that heady period, the '59 Burst was also used by Taylor later in the 1970s with other acts, before eventually being sold to a guitar shop in London, from which Simon acquired it in the early 1980s.

Simon's love of Les Pauls stretches back further still. "The first time I saw a Les Paul was seeing Peter Green in about 1967 at a gig in Southport," he recalls. "This was before Danny Kirwan joined. It was the very early days of Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac. They were unbelievably ramshackle but what an incredible band. Probably the best-sounding band I'd ever heard.

"Peter was playing his Les Paul through a Vox and something else, and the sound was just magnificent. As a band, they were outstanding. They listened to each other and they didn't play at huge volume. I'd never seen a Les Paul in real life before and, of course, that was Greeny. It was still very Cherry then. So for years I'd always been a fan of Les Pauls and Bursts in particular, and had always kept an eye out for one."

As fate would have it, a serendipitous series of unfortunate events led Simon to the *Exile* Burst. "Someone broke into my flat in London in the early 1980s and stole all of my guitars and gear, apart from

one Strat that they clearly didn't like the look of," says Simon. "Luckily, about the only sensible thing I did in those days was to have my stuff insured! I subsequently went down to a shop called Guitar Grapevine, which was on Denmark Place, around the corner from Denmark Street. They had a few lovely guitars, a couple of old Strats and a couple of Bursts. I took a shine to this one and put down a deposit and returned a few days later to buy it, and I've had it ever since! The manager, Stuart Sawney, only told me of the guitar's famous prior owners after I'd bought it. I got my sunburst '55 Strat from there about a week later too."

As guitar-shopping weeks go, that's about as good as it gets. However, it should be noted that the market for vintage Gibsons and celebrity-owned instruments in those days was nothing like it is now. Perhaps the shop manager felt that this well-used 20-year-old Les Paul that had a fair few parts changed, a hole in the back from an extra strap button and some general wear and tear, was best sold on its own merits rather than artist association.

There's no doubt, though, that this is the real deal. Due to the individuality of the grain and flame of its maple top, along with the way the finishes fade differently over time, each Burst has a unique fingerprint bestowed upon it.

"I think the Stones had about three or four Bursts," says Simon. "But what shows that this is the *Exile* Burst is the distinctive dog-leg in the grain here on the top and the very prominent flash of flame between the pickups. Those easily stand out in all the photographs. I only really researched it 10 or 15 years after I got it, and finally dug up all these old photographs of Keith and Mick Taylor using it."

Simon shows us a folio of treasured photographs, press cuttings and even the Guitar Grapevine store manager's business card and an old Rolling Stones

THIS PAGE The Cherry finish is still clearly visible beneath the pickguard of this special 1959 Burst. As for the mysterious serial number modification – could that added 'R' be anything to do with a certain Mr Richards?

THIS SPREAD One of the identifying features of the *Exile* Burst is the additional strap button hole on the back, along with its unique flame maple top and grain pattern

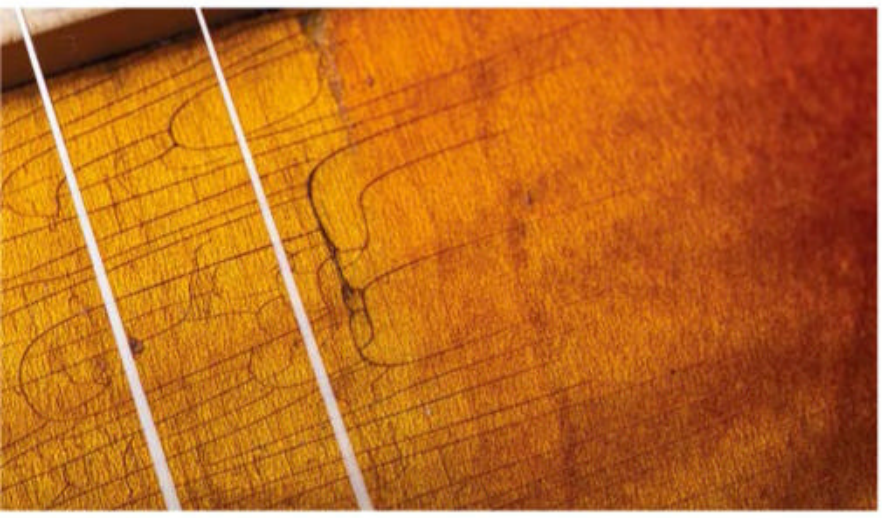
setlist from the era. Highlights include Keith Richards photographed at Sunset Sound with this very guitar, wearing a long-sleeve Stones logo t-shirt and a thousand-yard stare while lost in the music.

SOUL SURVIVOR

Any encounter with a genuine '59 Burst is to be treasured but given this guitar's place in the annals of rock history, we handle it with extra care. It has clearly had a busy working life. "When these guitars were on the road, they were constantly tweaked and made their best to be road ready," says Simon.

The beautifully comfortable neck has a classic profile that dissolves into your palm as you play it, and the small heel is typical of a '59, albeit with a likely neck refinish. The accompanying scratched-in serial number on the back of the headstock includes a decidedly non-factory-spec letter R for good measure – for 'Richards', perhaps?

The Les Paul is loaded with a pair of PAF pickups, one double-white at the bridge and one narrow 'jazz' spaced double-black at the neck. Under close examination, we also notice that the pickup covers and mounting screws, along with the thumbwheels



under the later wired nickel ABR-1 bridge, were originally gold and are now worn down to the nickel beneath.

But to focus on these modifications as flaws, blemishes, or anything than other than chapters in this remarkable instrument's story would be churlish. This is an incredibly inspiring instrument and one of the best-sounding and playing Bursts we've ever had the pleasure to spend time with. And if it was good enough for two Stones guitarists at the peak of their powers, who are we to argue? But Keith and Mick Taylor aren't the only big-name players to have used it. Not content with its star-studded past, Simon's Burst still likes to get up on stage and do what it does best.

"Joe Bonamassa played it on stage in Manchester a few years ago," says Simon. "I've got to say, he was great and a very thoughtful host. He sorted out backstage passes himself rather than delegate the task to a staff member, it was a great show and he did seem to like the Burst… although he was typically noncommittal!"

63 years after it rolled out of Kalamazoo, it seems that there's plenty of music left in this storied old guitar yet.

Maestro
Fuzz-Tone

FUZZ WAS THE FUTURE

PART FOUR: NOW BUT NOT YET

In the latest instalment of his exploration of the history of fuzz, Josh Scott takes us through the troubled early years of the first effects pedal and asks: how could they have got something so right, so very wrong?

WORDS JOSH SCOTT
PHOTOGRAPHY LARISSA VAN DER VYVER

Over the past few months, we've ploughed through the history of the guitar, and it's been a wild ride. We've jammed with cavemen in 500BC, gone kite-flying with Benjamin Franklin, and embarked on a cross-country road trip with Mark Twain. You even joined me in a sound-treated anechoic chamber in Japan. Most recently, we stood alongside studio engineer Glenn Snoddy while he made the history-changing decision to *leave in the fuzz* on a 1961 country and western hit. It's all led to this.

Now, I know that I promised last time that I'd wrap this up in the next article – and, in my defence, I 100 per cent intended to. That said, this home stretch is just too important to squeeze into one column. It needs two, and since this *is* a monthly column, let's make the most of it.

If you haven't been following my tour through guitar's unlikely sonic evolution so far, I'd suggest you head to *Guitar.com* and brush up on the first three articles in this series before continuing. It won't take long, and these last two sections are going to make a *lot* more sense if you do.

At this point in the narrative, I feel like a cross between Doctor Who and Bill S Preston Esquire (coincidentally, both time-travelled in phone booths). We've gone on a most excellent adventure through guitar's sonic history, a journey that began in 500BC and is still underway in 2021, and I've had the pleasure of being your tour guide through the whole thing. This, of course, brings up a very logical question: why don't I have a time-travelling phone booth? If anyone can be trusted with such a powerful device for the exploration of guitar history, surely it's me, right? But no. Instead, I'm sitting here, typing on my stone-age laptop computer, stuck in the present rather than teaching founding father Ben Franklin how to play *Free Bird* on a 1950s Strat. Sometimes, life's not fair. Okay, that's enough of that. Let's get back in our metaphorical phone booth and head to the not-yet-swinging 1960s.

2,000 Ways Not to Sell a Fuzz Pedal

Full disclosure: this first section is a bit of a downer. We already discussed how Gibson's initial efforts to market the fuzz pedal were a disaster. But it's equally important to understand just why it failed. For that reason – and to try and keep the mood light over the next few paragraphs – I'm bringing in my good friend Thomas A Edison to give us a pep talk. Edison was, of course, a genius inventor whose greatest creation, the light bulb, has become the *literal symbol for a great idea*. But it wasn't always smooth sailing. He tried and failed more than 2,000 times to invent a working light bulb before he nailed it. When critics brought this up, Edison responded, "I didn't fail.

I just found 2,000 ways not to make a light bulb; I only needed to find one way to make it work." With that in mind, you could say that Gibson spent the first three years of the Maestro Fuzz-Tone's life (roughly 1962 through 1965) finding 2,000 ways *not* to sell a fuzz pedal.

If you look at the marketing material from the time, it's unsurprising that their advertisement campaign totally tanked. How were they supposed to sell a product that no-one even remotely understood, that no-one thought that they needed, and that the majority of musicians were probably scared to even use? It was a product nightmare. Even Don Draper would have passed on pitching the Fuzz-Tone back in 1962.

True, people absolutely loved Marty Robbins' *Don't Worry* and the glorious studio accident that gave birth to the song's fuzzed-out solo. But could Gibson successfully build an entire advertisement campaign off that? Short answer: no.

I like to call the period between 1962 and 1965 the "now but not yet", a phrase that encapsulates up this moment in history rather well. It was a strange time, when western popular music was (metaphorically) on the edge of a cliff, with no-one able to decide whether or not it was the right time to jump. Revolutionary gear like the Fuzz-Tone *almost* fit into the cultural landscape of the early 1960s – but not quite.

In the late 1950s, a new generation of US teenagers had done what teenagers usually do best: utterly rejected their parents. These teens wanted to trade in the popular capitalist Cold War-infused, paranoia-fuelled lifestyle in favour of something more authentic. Some turned to folk music as the ultimate homespun alternative. Other teenagers hungered for something even further removed from their parents' ideals – something downright *rebellious*.

Thus rock 'n' roll began transitioning into rock. If you're not sure what the difference between the two is, listen to *Johnny B Goode* and *Sunshine Of Your Love* back to back. Get it, now?

It's no coincidence that the FZ-1 launched the same year that Capitol Records dropped Les Paul as a recording artist. By this point, the characteristically polished vocals and exquisite guitar technique of the 1950s were officially out of fashion, and this new audience wanted something dirty, gritty and even a little offensive. But the outright offensive nature of this new rock music actually has its roots in songs that, circa 2021, we would call totally harmless.

Clocking In

Case in point: *Rock Around The Clock* by Bill Haley and the Comets is remembered these days as an innocent teeny-bopper jingle. But when it peaked in 1955, this song literally incited riots. *Rock Around The Clock* was featured in the 1955 film *Blackboard Jungle*, and it riled up teenagers so much at screenings that they started dancing in the aisles, ripping up the theatre seats, getting into fights and generally trashing whatever venue they happened to be in. As far as parents were concerned, this proved beyond all reasonable doubt that rock 'n' roll really was "the devil's music".

At this point, US parents did what parents usually do best: overreacted out of concern for their kids. I'm not just talking about throwing a few records in the trash. When Elvis Presley released *Heartbreak Hotel* in 1956, overzealous parents literally burned him in effigy in St Louis. I'm not sure even Alice Cooper or Ozzy Osbourne has that claim to fame. According to historian Ronald L Davis, psychiatrists at the time called rock 'n' roll a "communicable disease" and pronounced it "a cannibalistic and tribalistic" form of music.

The "cannibalistic and tribalistic" music they're referring to here is edgy songs such as 1952's *I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus*, 1958's *Splish Splash* ("I was taking a bath"), 1962's *Puff The Magic Dragon* and 1963's *Louie Louie*, all of which were banned from the radio for fear that they would corrupt the American youth. These responses show that people weren't ready for the angst of fuzzed-out electric guitars.

The FZ-1 launched in 1962, the same year that Jimi Hendrix was discharged from the US army and The Beatles recorded *Love Me Do*. Within a year, The Rolling Stones' *Come On* and the Beach Boys' *Surfin' USA* would rocket to the top of the charts. Within two years Pete Townsend would smash his guitar onstage for the first time at a London concert.

The rock 'n' roll of the 1950s had evolved into an unstoppable force; politics, technology and culture were pressing in on all sides, and guitar effects such as fuzz and distortion would help subversive rockers like the Stones, The Kinks and The Who embrace this entirely new era of music.

The FZ-1 was the perfect piece of gear to do that. The problem was, when Gibson released it in 1962, no-one seemed to care. With a few thousand FZ-1s sitting on retail shelves across the country, the potential didn't match its reality. This was partly due to what I call development delay, and it goes a long way to explaining why people didn't understand the FZ-1 when it was first released. We see development delay in the first car, the first MP3 player, and the first internet service. The product that comes first is guaranteed the uphill battle of explaining itself, while the later Ford Mustang, Apple iPod and fibre-optic internet have nothing to explain – they are simply the progression of an established technology. Every technology has this; do a little digging on your favourite product and you'll discover which inventions led to its existence. The Fuzz-Tone may have been the first but, like most firsts, it was by no means the best.

Sell Out

The most revealing proof of the Maestro Fuzz-Tone's failure to launch can be found in its very first marketing campaign. This is an important moment in the timeline of guitar. The FZ-1 was not only the first guitar pedal, it also produced the *first-ever* pedal demo, in the form of a vinyl record that was shipped to dealers across the US. Like any good demo, it endeavoured to explain what exactly the FZ-1 was supposed to do.

I've listened to this demo dozens of times and, every time I do, I share the confusion that guitarists and music-shop salesmen must have felt concerning the FZ-1 in 1962. The narrator can't seem to make up his mind about what exactly the FZ-1 is supposed to be used for, as he gushes, "It's mellow! It's raucous! It's tender! It's raw! It's the Maestro Fuzz-Tone." What does that mean?

In a frantic transatlantic accent, the narrator tells listeners that they can give their guitars organ-like tones, make them sound like mellow woodwinds, whispering reeds, booming brass and bell-clear horns, and that they can utilise it with their amp's effects, including reverberation, tremolo and vibrato. The "fuzz" sound that rocketed Marty Robbins to the top of the charts is at least demonstrated in a *Don't Worry*-esque track within the record, but the guitarist doesn't quite deliver the same tone as Grady Martin.

Gibson had brought out a product that did one revolutionary thing – but they lacked the confidence to simply state what that was, and instead gilded the lily with reed, brass and organ-like-tones.

Even getting the pedal into the hands of the greatest musicians of all time didn't help. Photos of The Beatles circa 1963 feature the FZ-1 on the floor at Abbey Road Studio 2 during the recording session for *She Loves You*, and again later that year while they recorded *Don't Bother Me*. But the fuzz effect isn't heard on either of these records. The Beatles saw the potential in this new sound, clearly, but fuzz didn't actually make it into one of their final recordings until 1965's *Think For Yourself*.

Between 1962 and 1965, the Fuzz-Tone, and fuzz itself, was set to be filed alongside the thousands of other failed musical innovations. But then came a young man from Dartford who wanted to record a horn part that had come to him in a dream…

Tune in next month for the actual, real, we're-not-kidding last article in this mini-series: Satisfaction Guaranteed. Coincidentally, if you want to do a deeper dive on the FZ-1's terrible pedal demo, you can watch my YouTube video 'The First Pedal Demo Ever Made'. See you soon.

Join Josh for more adventures in effect pedals at thejhsshow.com

CODAMUSIC

Fender Custom Shop

WHEN YOU'RE READY

A Custom Shop guitar embodies everything Fender has learned over 60 years of building the world's most revered electric solidbodies. The finest materials, all the right details, handbuilt in Corona, California – it's the guitar of your dreams, realised.

WE HAVE THE GUITAR FOR YOU

Coda Music is Europe's biggest and best Fender Custom Shop dealer, so whether you want a perfect New Old Stock, vintage-correct model, or the heaviest of Heavy Relics with a raft of custom playability tweaks, you'll find it here and with over 100 in stock in one store you won't find a better selection anywhere.

UNIQUE TO US, UNIQUE TO YOU

Our extensive in-store stock includes many custom ordered guitars, built to our own exacting specs after years of buying, selling and playing these fabulous instruments.

CAN WE BUILD IT?

Yes we can! If you have that extra special something in mind, we can work with you to make it a reality. Custom orders can be ready in a matter of months and cost less than you might think – call us, email us or drop in to discuss your perfect combination of features.

www.coda-music.com

51a High Street, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 3AH t : 01438 350 815 e : stevenage@coda-music.co.uk
Acoustic Centre 27b Church Lane, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 3QW t: 01438 350815 e: acoustics@coda-music.com

Instant decision 9 months 0% finance
available on all new products over £300 on our website

REVIEWS

CONTENTS

078 GIBSON GENERATION COLLECTION G-45 & G-00

088 GRETSCH VINTAGE SELECT 1989 DUO JET

092 CHARVEL PRO-MOD SAN DIMAS STYLE 1 HSS HT E & HSS FR M

098 RIVOLTA REGATA VII

102 WALRUS AUDIO ERAS

104 MOD DEVICES DWARF

106 THIMBLE WASP EFFECTS TIME LAPSE, SPACE CAMP & ANVIL

LOOKING FOR MORE REVIEWS?
VISIT GUITAR.COM

Gibson
STUDER
REVOX

Ace in the hole: the Player Port was inspired by a Gibson soundport design from 1964

GIBSON
GENERATION COLLECTION G-45 & G-00

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Do Gibson's new soundport-equipped acoustic guitars give you the best seat in the house?

Like all good stories, the tale of Gibson's new line of hand-built acoustics begins with the chance discovery of an ancient artefact. From the company archive (which we imagine is something like the enormous warehouse in which the Ark Of The Covenant is entombed at the end of the first Indiana Jones movie) a long-forgotten 1964 blueprint was recently unearthed depicting a model that never went into production named the Modern J-45. This deeply weird take on Gibson's iconic slope-shouldered design incorporated both an archtop bridge and tailpiece and, in lieu of a soundhole in the top of the guitar, a large circular soundport in the lower side.

Excited by the potential of this idea, Gibson Brand President Cesar Gueikian and Head of Product Development Mat Koehler set about creating an instrument from the original blueprint to test the concept. This was reinterpreted for the 21st century and the Generation Collection was born. Our review guitars represent half of the new range: the G-45 slope-shouldered jumbo and smaller-bodied G-00. Stay tuned for a look at the fancier G-Writer (£1,449) and G-200 (£1,799) models next month.

At first glance, these rather sparsely appointed instruments look quite traditional and understated, with their unbound Sitka spruce tops, striped ebony fingerboards and conventional bridges, and their black plastic scratchplates. However, turning either guitar's slightly slimmed-down body around reveals backs and sides of lustrous figured walnut, which retains much of its character under the thin satin nitrocellulose finish. Walnut can be wonderful in the right hands and Gibson has proved in the past that it certainly knows what it's doing with this tonewood.

The big eyebrow-raiser, of course, is that elliptical plastic-edged soundport – or Player Port, as Gibson calls it – which has been relocated from its position on the lower side in the 1964 blueprints to the shoulder of the instrument. Those keeping track of trends in acoustic guitar making will doubtless associate soundports with the work of bleeding edge steel-string luthiers such as Grit Laskin, Michael Greenfield and Casimi Guitars, rather than a company that can trace its lineage back to the 1890s. But then again, there's that blueprint from 1964, and there's little doubt that the Ted McCarty era was a whirlwind of innovation at Gibson.

Hole truth: the Player Port offers some unique visual perspectives on the internal architecture of each Generation Collection instrument

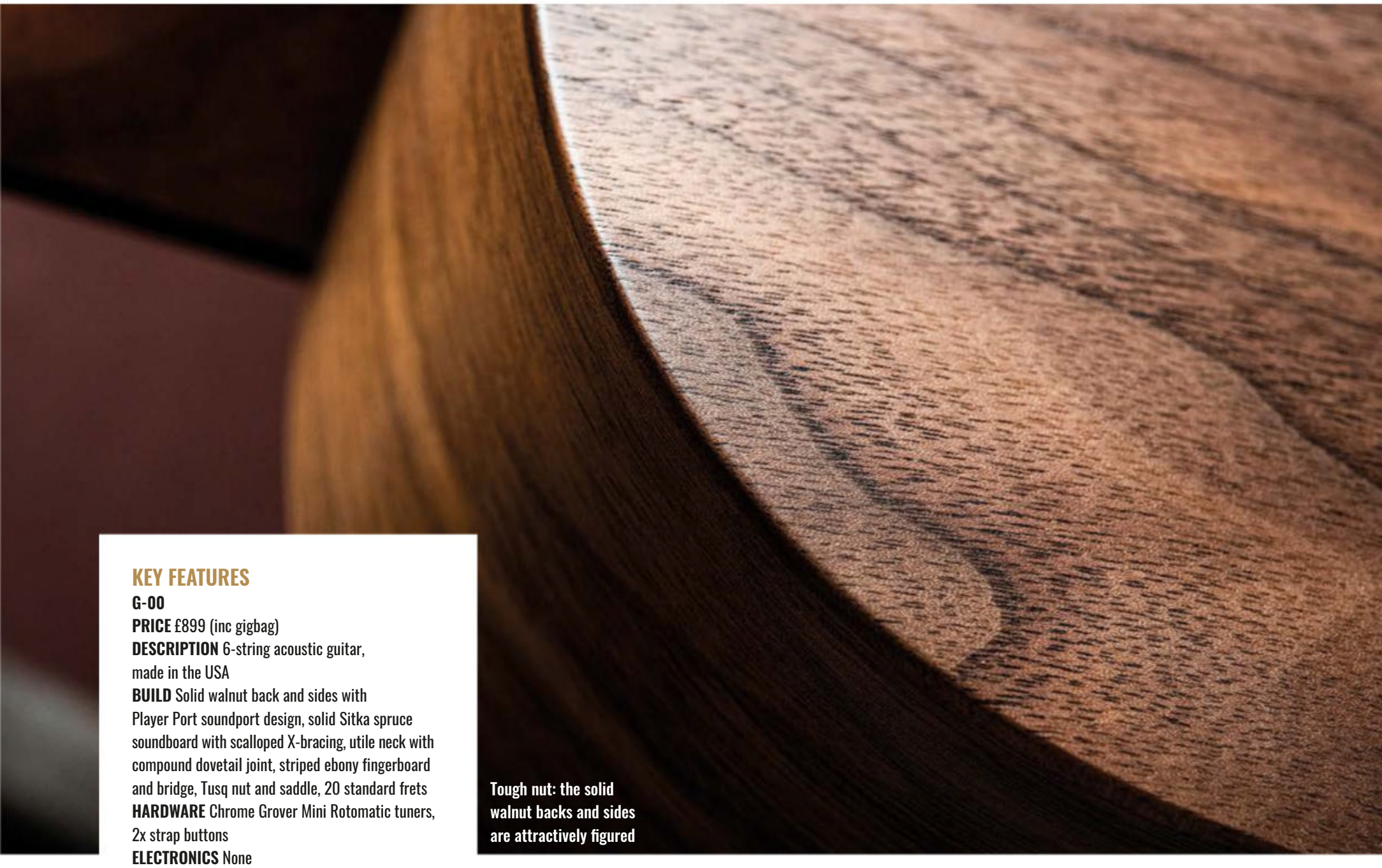
Both review instruments feature compound dovetail-joined 14-fret necks set with hot hide glue and made from utile, a mahogany-like timber you may also know as sipo. Both necks are carved to Gibson's Advanced Response profile – in real terms a gentle C – and are slim, with a 43.8mm nut width. The fretwork is good across the 'boards and, while we're talking dimensions, both guitars are built around Gibson's nominal 24.75-inch scale length, just as you would expect.

Continuing the Spartan vibe established by the lack of body binding, the headstocks are capped with walnut and feature a plain silver logo decal, while the side position markers are small circles of white plastic – functional, if not particularly beautiful. There are no onboard electronics – you'll have to go elsewhere in the range for that – but both guitars come with strap buttons already mounted, an indication that they are intended as much for the upstanding as the seated unplugged warrior.

IN USE

We kick off our taster session with the smaller-bodied G-00, which sits beautifully on the lap. Before the initial strum, we can't resist a quick peek through the Player Port. This reveals a standard albeit slightly untidy traditional bracing pattern of an X and twin tone bars. Interestingly, the X is uncapped.

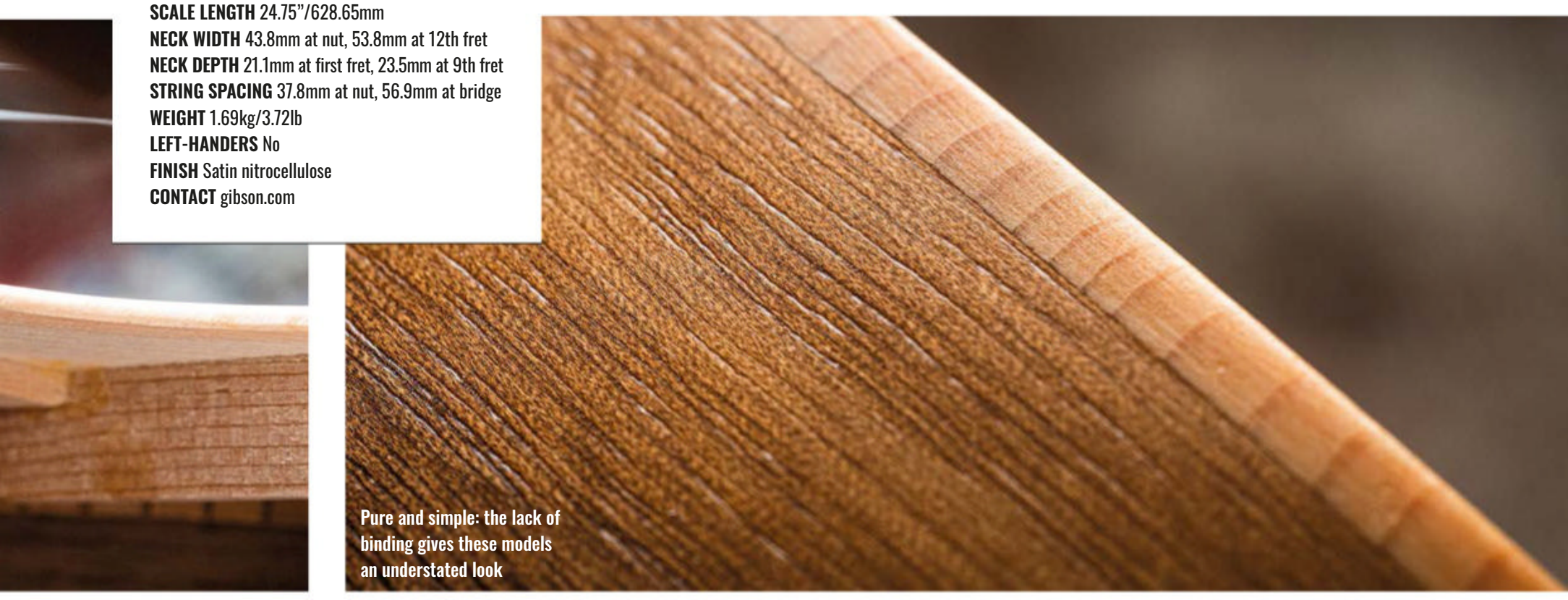
A light Sitka spruce top can be a joy over walnut, and tapping behind the rectangular ebony bridge reveals a tight little sweet spot



Tough nut: the solid walnut backs and sides are attractively figured

KEY FEATURES

G-00
PRICE £899 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION 6-string acoustic guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Solid walnut back and sides with Player Port soundport design, solid Sitka spruce soundboard with scalloped X-bracing, utile neck with compound dovetail joint, striped ebony fingerboard and bridge, Tusq nut and saddle, 20 standard frets
HARDWARE Chrome Grover Mini Rotomatic tuners, 2x strap buttons
ELECTRONICS None
SCALE LENGTH 24.75”/628.65mm
NECK WIDTH 43.8mm at nut, 53.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.1mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 37.8mm at nut, 56.9mm at bridge
WEIGHT 1.69kg/3.72lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Satin nitrocellulose
CONTACT gibson.com



Pure and simple: the lack of binding gives these models an understated look

and a surprising amount of resonance through the Player Port. A sign of things to come?

Our first open chords in standard tuning come as something of a revelation. It would not be unfair to expect a freshly minted small-body guitar to have a pronounced boxy character but the G-00 is surprisingly breathy, with a lively shimmer. The timbral spectrum, typical of walnut, emphasises the fundamental of the note while still providing enough upper-partial content to ensure you have a good time.

Dropping the G-00 into DADGAD takes us into delicious 1960s folk-revival territory. It’s a warm, dry sound that’s very inviting. The trebles sparkle and the bass response, while not exactly authoritative, is present and supportive throughout.

Swapping over to the G-45, we are immediately struck by the fact that this guitar still sounds like a J-45. No matter how much you mess with that vintage formula, the classic sound remains. Everything we have grown to love about the voice of the iconic slope-shoulder design is present and correct in this guitar, from the woody trebles to the slightly smeared bass response.

Due to the proximity of the Player Port to our right ear, what we also have in this case is a far more present playing experience. If you are a soundport virgin, we urge you to try it at least once. It’s an interesting sensation, and one that’s a lot like listening to a detailed close-mic’d recording. It can be quite intoxicating.

Silver lining: a simple silver logo adorns the walnut-capped headstocks

Set and match: the utile necks are set with hot hide glue

In the interests of science, we place a hand over the Player Port to see how much difference it makes to the sound. Not only is the sonic contrast marked but we can actually feel a slightly disconcerting vacuum sensation as the skin of our palm is gently sucked into the hole with every note. In almost 20 years of playing soundport-equipped guitars, this reviewer can honestly say that this has never happened before!

Dropping down into Orkney tuning to test the bass response with a low C reveals a different facet to the G-45. The shorter-scale trebles become thicker and more expressive in lower tunings and there is also the perception of a lot more sympathetic resonance than usual. The bass now growls deep but there is enough steel on the initial transient (thanks in no small part to the Sitka spruce top) to ensure that things remain articulate and detailed. Throughout our low-slung explorations on both guitars, the intonation remains impressively accurate.

KEY FEATURES

G-45
PRICE £1,099 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION 6-string acoustic guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Solid walnut back and sides with Player Port soundport design, solid Sitka spruce soundboard with scalloped X-bracing, utile neck with compound dovetail joint, striped ebony fingerboard and bridge, Tusq nut and saddle, 20 standard frets
HARDWARE Chrome Grover Mini Rotomatic tuners, 2x strap buttons
ELECTRONICS None
SCALE LENGTH 24.75" / 628.65mm
NECK WIDTH 43.8mm at nut, 53.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.1mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 37.8mm at nut, 56.9mm at bridge
WEIGHT 1.76kg/3.88lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Satin nitrocellulose

Given the quality of the sound of both instruments, as well as their obvious potential applications as recording guitars – blending a soundport mic into a mix can deliver wonderful results – it's easy to see the Gibson Generation Collection as an attractive option. However, factor in the accessible pricing of these US-built, nitro-finished instruments and they get even more appealing. We might be looking at some of the very best acoustic guitars at this end of the market.

9/10 **The Generation Collection channels Gibson's history of innovation to deliver fresh and affordable new takes on classic models – and the Player Port is far more than a gimmick**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Epiphone Slash Collection J-45 **£799**
Eastman E10 SS/V **£1,459**
Taylor GTe Urban Ash **£1,835**

ATB GUITARS

THE UK'S NO. 1 STOP FOR CLASSIC VINTAGE FENDER AND GIBSON GUITARS

- FENDER & GIBSON -

Wanted!

TOP PRICES PAID

FROM 50'S, 60'S OR 70'S

@ATBGUITARS

IVISON DAKOTA EMBER RED

FENDER & GIBSON, ACOUSTIC, SEMI & ELECTRIC GUITARS • BASSES • AMPS • PEDALS • ACCESSORIES

CONTACT US FOR AN APPOINTMENT

T. 01242 697607
E. INFO@ATBGUITARS.COM

WWW.ATBGUITARS.COM

HEISTERCAMP · Thorpy FX · AIR Est. 2015 · HUDSON · BEETRONICS · TOASTER CABLES · FLOYLEY · Ivison GUITARS · DanDrive · ORIGIN EFFECTS

GENERATION GAMES

THE STORY OF GIBSON'S GENERATION COLLECTION

Gibson's Generation Collection acoustics have been 57 years in the making. Here we speak to Cesar Gueikian and Mat Koehler to find out how a soundport concept from 1964 finally came to fruition

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS **PHOTOGRAPHY** GIBSON

One of the joys of taking the helm of a heritage brand such as Gibson must be having unfettered access to the company archive, which in this case extends back as far as the late 19th century. Imagine the sense of wonder, then, that came with the discovery of a blueprint in the Gibson vaults from 1964 illustrating what was, for the time, a startlingly innovative approach to acoustic guitar making.

Labelled the Modern J-45, the blueprint depicts the familiar outline of Gibson's iconic slope-shoulder jumbo but with some surprising additional features – most notably a large, circular soundhole in the lower side of the guitar. Rather like fanned frets and body bevels, soundports have been a not uncommon sight in modern luthier-made acoustic guitars since the late 1990s. But this is Gibson – in 1964!

From that initial spark of inspiration provided by the Modern J-45 design came the idea for a new line of boundary-pushing acoustic guitars. Hand-made at Gibson's dedicated acoustic facility in Bozeman, Montana, the Generation Collection mixes more than a century of instrument-making experience with modern techniques and player-friendly features.

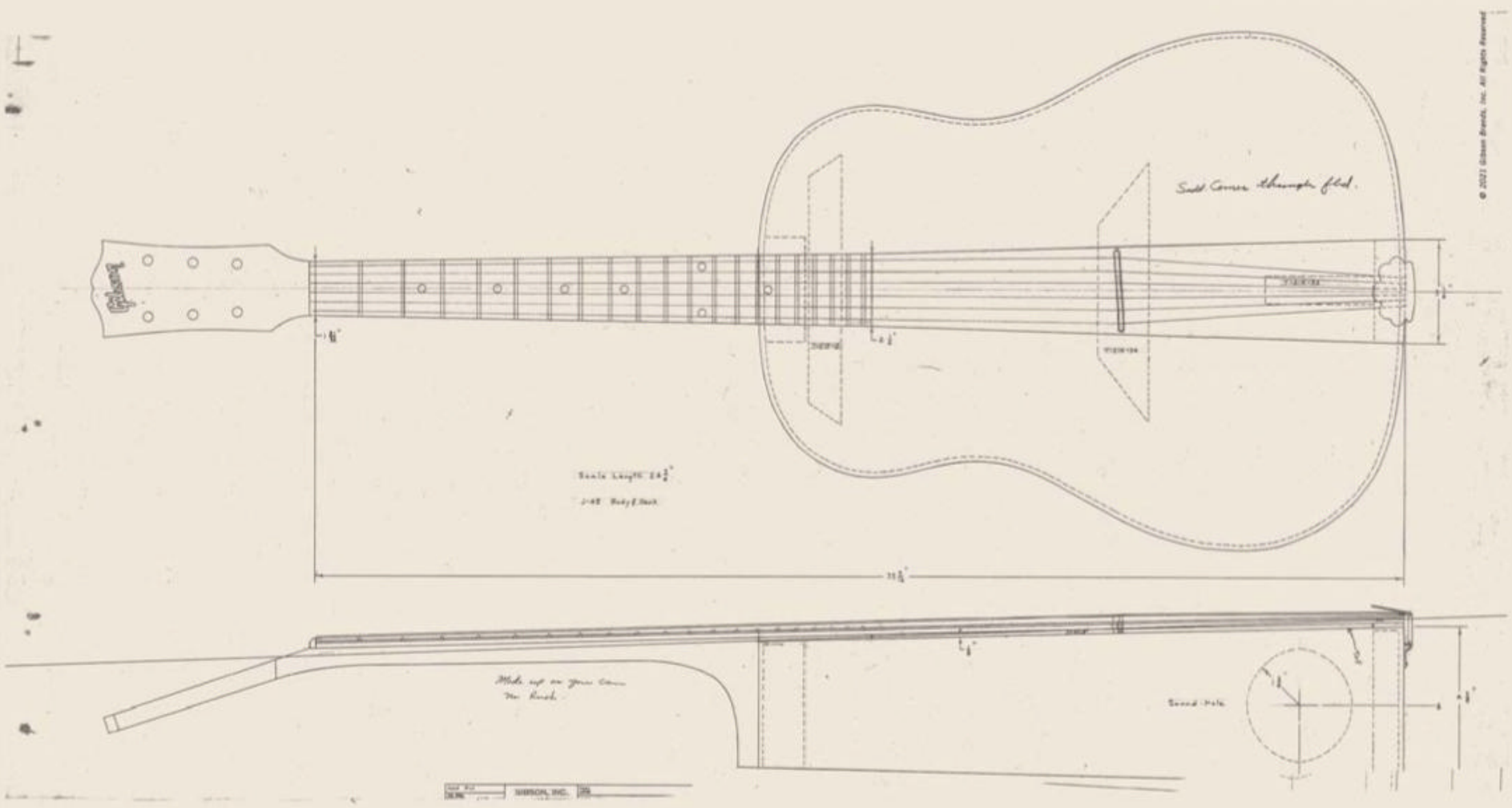
Gibson Brand President Cesar Gueikian tells us how it all began. "One day," he recalls, "Mat Koehler [Gibson's Head of Product Development] and I were looking through our archives here in the Gibson vault, and we found this blueprint of a J-45 with a soundhole projecting up to the player. There was no soundhole in the front of the guitar at all. We were inspired by this to explore the concept in the Generation Collection that we are introducing now in 2021 but it's a project that goes back to one of the most creative periods of Gibson's history. This was inspired by that original blueprint from our golden era back in 1964.

"You know, the classical guitar is built in a way that projects to the audience, that's how it should be. But over the years, various luthiers and guitar companies have experimented with soundholes in different places, especially on the sides. There is a lot going on in this new Generation Collection but the biggest innovation is the Gibson Player Port which, as you can hear, gives you a full sonic experience – it gives you more of you! You get to hear your playing, just like the audience would."

A man whose Instagram feed is full of beautiful one-off vintage Gibson and Epiphone instruments, Mat Koehler looked at this discovery as a scientific and creative challenge. "Really, this is an investigation," he says. "We started with an observation – this incredible blueprint from 1964 – then we researched the topic area. What was Gibson pursuing with this idea at that time and what were they finding? And then we had a hypothesis that we could make it better. The next step was finding out how, and with our modern technology we made many advancements in understanding the sonics and construction of acoustic guitars."

It's tempting to wonder what Gibson's 1960s design team might have been looking for in that extraordinary, experimental approach. Koehler thinks he knows, if not the expected outcome, then at least the intent that went into the first design.

"That original blueprint stands out from the pack," he adds. "They'd labelled it the Modern J-45, which is interesting because they used an archtop-like set-up of a bridge and tailpiece, which was not necessarily the most modern approach even in 1964. My understanding from the blueprint is that they were trying to explore wildly creative new takes on acoustic guitar design while still using classic Gibson shapes. Not coincidentally, that is the same intention that we approached this project with. We wanted to do something new and exciting with designs and materials but without straying away from our identity.



While it might be game-changing news to the guitar world in general that Gibson may have been the first company to explore soundport techniques, it's not exactly a surprise to us to see evidence of just how focused on innovation Ted McCarty and his team at Gibson were at that time. Looking at the work of the period, you could see that it was game on – they were an incredibly creative force. This is something that is clearly authentic to Gibson's innovations so why not explore it in the 21st century – we felt a sense of responsibility to find out."

Going from an initial prototype to the launch of a whole new line is not a simple process, of course, but with Gibson's new leadership team driven to honour the company's heritage, for Cesar Gueikian, it felt like a natural progression.

"The last three years have been a celebration of craftsmanship – of what has made Gibson such a historically important company. We make handcrafted instruments in the USA and we're proud of that. Our acoustic guitars, made in Bozeman, Montana, are resonant, vibrant instruments that project amazing sounds. This is indicative of how we are paying attention to every aspect of the construction.

"After we built the first prototype we went into thinking mode in the Gibson Lab. How would we bring this to life today? So we started testing with different tonewoods and designs – we were getting excited by this point! What was really amazing was how well our traditional acoustic guitar-making techniques worked with this design. Yes it may have some very modern aspects but it's the same bracing, the same voicing, the same degree of a dome to the top, the same hide glue – the same way we've been making guitars since Orville Gibson!"

Bringing the creative power of the Gibson Lab to bear, Koehler began to translate the McCarty-era vision to the 21st century with an extensive run of prototypes that would bring the concept up to date.

"There was a lot of research and development with different soundhole locations, shapes and sizes," he says. "The designs definitely changed because we were trying to harness the full power of a Gibson guitar. We tried a lot of different woods but we knew we wanted something that was readily available and sustainable, and obviously walnut is at the top of the list there. It's such a beautiful wood, sonically and visually. Some of the best Montana guitars I have ever heard were made from walnut – I also have a 1973 Epiphone FT79 made from walnut that I just love. It splits the difference between mahogany and rosewood, when used in a Gibson design, in such a beautiful way. It's just killer!

"Once we'd established that we would be using walnut, we were able to design the range around that," adds Mat. "The shape and location of the soundhole, everything was informed by the sonic characteristics of that wood. The aesthetics are important too – we didn't want the body wood looking wildly different from the neck, for instance. We wanted an elegant look that would play well within the Modern Collection.

"After a long time spent testing and researching, we completed the final prototypes and they blew everybody away here in Nashville! Everyone was

OPPOSITE The 1964 blueprint from the Gibson archive depicts an early design for a side-mounted soundhole

using the same words to describe the new guitars: 'immersive', 'you can hear more of your playing'. Everyone had a similar response. We knew we had something special at that point but I'm not sure we even understood the scope of it at the time. That this could be a really important addition to our range."

Gradually, the Generation Collection concept began to crystallise with an emphasis on high-performance, ergonomics and sustainability – not an easy balance to maintain in the modern world.

"We were able to evaluate and evolve the design in our lab, where we do all our research and innovation," says Cesar, "and now we're bringing it to players around the world. The challenge was to create a guitar for the next generation of players – it has to be comfortable to play, with a great neck, and it has to be offered at an accessible price point. But it also has to be a forever Gibson, like every guitar we build – they're made as forever guitars. Because of the tonewoods that we selected – walnut back and sides with Sitka spruce tops and utile necks with striped ebony fingerboards and bridges, and the super-thin satin finish that we used – we are able to offer this new sonic experience at a new price-point."

With the Generation Collection now launched worldwide and a rumoured line of accessories to come, we wonder about Gibson's plans for the future. Will there be other wood options? Will we see Player Ports in other lines? Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Brand President won't be drawn into revealing much at this stage.

"Oh man, we have so many plans that we can't wait to share," says Gueikian. "That's why we have the Gibson Lab in the first place. It's there for us to explore and test, and we will continue to innovate and get great guitars into the hands of our artists, get feedback from them and continue the process. We have a new generation of players who love Gibson guitars and they inspire us to offer something new and wonderful but also highly complementary with our existing portfolio architecture in terms of Custom Shop, Historic and Modern acoustic guitars. This is a great addition to the Modern Collection!"

Find out more at gibson.com

GRETSCH
GRETSCH
BY
Bigsby

GRETSCH

G6129T-89 VINTAGE SELECT '89 SPARKLE JET

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

This remake of a guitar from the heady days of grunge and Britpop is proof positive that there's far more to Gretsch than just rockabilly

Though most guitarists come to Gretsch via the likes of Chet Atkins, Eddie Cochran, George Harrison and Brian Setzer – and even Malcolm Young and Billy Duffy – those of us who were teenagers in the 1990s may well cite Soundgarden's Chris Cornell or Ash's Tim Wheeler as their gateway drug to the brand. And it's the Sparkle Jets wielded by Cornell and Wheeler that provide the template for this new Vintage Select model, which pays tribute to the 6129's reintroduction at the end of the 1980s.

The enlarged black headstock, horseshoe inlay and pearloid hump-block markers are all present and correct – even the mahogany body's internal chambering pattern is claimed to match that of the period. But, as Gretsch aficionados will note, the bridge and pickups have been given a substantial upgrade for this reissue. While original models came with a six-saddle bridge design that was notorious for rattling, here that has been sensibly swapped out for a more stable Adjusto-Matic. The hot ceramic pickups, meanwhile, have been ditched in favour of TV Jones Classic Plus (bridge) and Classic (neck) Filter'Tron types.

Available in both Silver and Gold Sparkle finishes, aside from being one of the best-looking instruments on the planet, the Vintage Select '89 Sparkle Jet is also testament to just how well sorted modern Gretsch instruments are compared to the pre-FMIC models of the 1990s and the instruments of the pre-Baldwin era. Look as closely as you like; the construction, fit and finish here are basically flawless. In addition, stealth features such as the pinned bridge and the treble-bleed circuit on the volume control make this a pro Gretsch you can gig confidently straight out of the box without need for modifications – something which hasn't always been a given!

Time machine: the combination of G-Arrow knobs and drum-wrap sparkle top goes right back to the 1950s

IN USE

It's tempting to suggest that you could screw a couple of TV Classics and a Bigsby to a kitchen worktop and get a great sound but, even by the high standards of Gretsch's modern Japanese builds, there's more going on here than simply the sum of some very good parts. Plugged into an old 5E3 or similar, it's instant Neil Young. The Sparkle Jet sings sweetly when you lay back and, when you dig in, it *bawls*. While there's no shortage of power on tap, the clarity, harmonic complexity and articulation here offer a noticeable upgrade on the High Sensitive Filter'Trons in our 2013 Gretsch Panther.

At 8.6lb, our review guitar is perhaps a little on the heavy side but it's certainly not as weighty as some 1990s models we've encountered. And the friendly neck profile and superb balance make it an instrument that you can strap on for long rehearsals or live performance with minimal fatigue. There are plenty of naysayers where the combination of a Bigsby and tune-o-matic is concerned but it works perfectly here, with a frictionless feel that's among the very best factory Bigsby setups we've encountered.

This is obviously a dazzling design that's tough to walk past without picking up but when you do, you won't want to put it down either. The only tweak that might improve the recipe would be to add one of Gretsch's handy String-Thru Bigsby anchor bars for ease of stringing. But honestly, everything works so well on this particular instrument that we'd be loath to change a thing.

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £2,759 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Single-cutaway 6-string electric guitar, made in Japan
BUILD Chambered mahogany body and arched laminated maple top with white binding and b/w/b purfling, set maple neck, bound rosewood fingerboard with 12" radius, pearloid hump-block inlays and 22 medium-jumbo frets. Bone nut
HARDWARE Adjusto-Matic bridge, Bigsby B3C vibrato tailpiece, Gotoh die-cast tuners, strap retainer buttons
ELECTRONICS TV Jones TV Classic Plus (bridge) and TV Classic (neck) humbucking pickups, master volume w/ treble-bleed circuit, master tone, individual pickup volume controls, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.6"/625mm
NECK WIDTH 42.6mm at nut, 52.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.2mm at first fret, 23.6mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.2mm at nut, 51.1mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.9kg/8.6lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Gloss urethane with Gold Sparkle top. Also available in Silver Sparkle, and Black as the G6128T-89 Vintage Select '89 Duo Jet
CONTACT gretschguitars.com

9/10 **A stellar tribute that improves on the original in terms of playability, stability and tone**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Guild Aristocrat HH **£795**
Duesenberg Starplayer TV **£2,145**
Fender Parallel Universe Volume II Maverick Dorado **£2,419**

OUR GENERATION
Drones play Rotosound electric guitar strings:
the sound of British punk rock since 1977
ROTOSOUND®
@rotosound_uk

CHARVEL

PRO-MOD SAN DIMAS STYLE 1 HSS HT E SASSAFRAS & HSS FR M

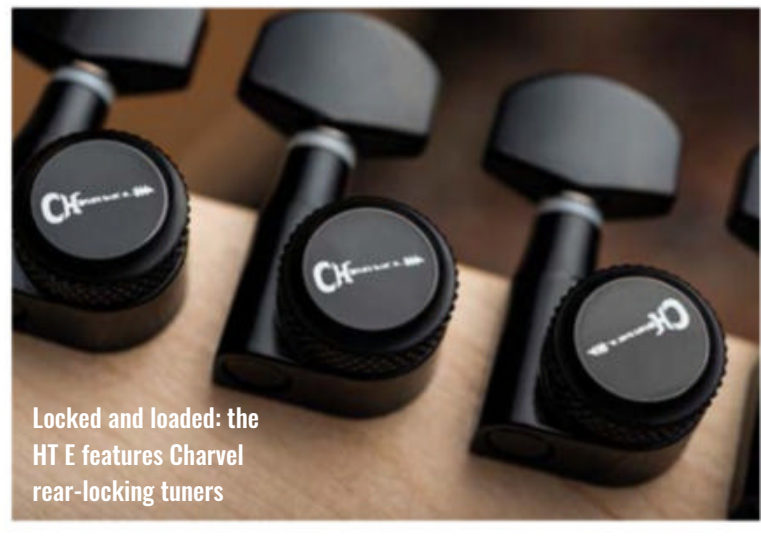
WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

Two flavours of HSS electric from Charvel's ever-expanding Pro-Mod Series

There can be little doubt that Charvel offers an enormous amount of choice to the modern rock guitarist, and this no-nonsense duo comprises two of the most recent additions to its Mexico-made Pro-Mod Series. Though the model names might appear confusing at first, fortunately they're not too difficult to decode: the HSS HT E Sassafras is a hardtail in Satin Black, while the HSS FR M is equipped with a Floyd Rose and comes in gloss Platinum Pearl. But just how good are they?

Back in the saddle: the sassafras model sports Charvel's HT6 string-through-body hardtail bridge

Paint it black: the HT E features black hardware to match its satin finish



Locked and loaded: the HT E features Charvel rear-locking tuners

Sassafras isn't a tonewood we encounter very often but it comes with pedigree, as it was used in very limited quantities in the early days of Fender. More recently, the company has been considering it as an alternative to the increasingly scarce swamp ash, which is plagued by both climate change and the emerald ash borer beetle.

Sassafras's aesthetic similarity to swamp ash is clear and, here in the Charvel family, the HT E's Satin Black finish accentuates its deep grain. Our example is wonderfully light too, weighing little more than 7lb. The 12-16-inch compound radius ebony fingerboard suits the needs of today's modern string-stretchers, and the black hardware completes the stealthy look.

The FR M shares the hardtail model's compound radius fingerboard geometry and its slim C neck profile, with a hand-rubbed satin urethane finish and rolled 'board edges. This time, however, the fretboard is maple. The recessed Floyd Rose 1000 Series double-locking vibrato bridge comes with a brass block and, naturally, a locking nut to match. The hardware is chrome, which combines with the Platinum Pearl finish to give this instrument a much fresher and less overtly metal aesthetic than its sibling. However, the additional hardware and alder body adds more than an extra pound in weight.

IN USE

Seymour Duncan is the designated pickup provider and both models sport the ubiquitous JB TB-4 in the bridge, with

Raise the bar: nothing says 'rock' quite like a Floyd Rose

Nut job: the FR M is equipped with a Floyd Rose 1000 Series locking nut

Custom Flat Strat SSL-6 single-coils in the middle position, and reverse-wound, reverse-polarity versions at the neck. It's no surprise, then, that we head straight for the Diezel VH4 preset on our Axe-Fx III.

Plugging in the HT E, the tonal properties of sassafras manifest themselves immediately. It's a kind of a middle ground between alder and swamp ash but with additional low-end heft. This depth becomes more apparent on the neck pickup and, in conjunction with slight spike in the upper mids, we quickly find ourselves in Nuno Bettencourt-style percussive rock rhythm territory. Switching to the bridge, we're treated to full-throated rock, which again favours the upper mids. But that sense of depth lingers and lead sounds simply sing without the need for any additional boost.

Somewhat predictably, the Floyd Rose model boasts a little less sustain than the string-through HT E, while the FR M's alder body and maple fingerboard project a trebly snappiness that requires some taming.

Through like-for-like amplifier settings, the HT E delivers the more strident rock tone but, once we dial in a little more gain, the FR M proves that it can get equally mean. On cleaner settings, the FR M delivers some pretty authentic Hendrix-style tones in the neck position. And, if you want to expand the palette even further, positions two (bridge inner coil and middle pickup), three (bridge outer coil and neck pickup) and four (middle and neck pickup) have plenty of spank on tap.

Both instruments feature the now fashionable no-load tone control, which removes itself from the circuit entirely when wide open and doubtless contributes to the unbridled sonics on offer from each of these instruments. In contrast, the volume controls have a much lower friction feel, and it's easy to roll off a fair bit of gain by accident until you get used to the position of the controls.

That minor quirk aside, both of these HSS instruments seem set to be popular additions to Charvel's Pro-Mod Series and the sassafras model in particular brings something genuinely new to the table. Ultimately, whether in a recording or live environment, these guitars demand to be heard.

KEY FEATURES

PRO-MOD SAN DIMAS STYLE 1 HSS HT E SASSAFRAS
PRICE £959
DESCRIPTION 6-string double-cutaway electric guitar, made in Mexico
BUILD Sassafras body, bolt-on graphite-reinforced maple neck with 12-16" compound radius ebony fretboard, 22 jumbo frets, black plastic nut
HARDWARE Charvel die-cast locking tuners, Charvel HT6 string-through-body hardtail bridge
ELECTRONICS Seymour Duncan JB TB-4 humbucker (bridge), Custom Flat Strat SSL-6 single-coil (middle), Custom Flat Strat SSL-6 RWRP single-coil (neck), 5-way blade selector switch, master volume, no-load tone control
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 43.6mm at nut, 52.7mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.0mm at 1st fret, 21.3mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 52.7mm at bridge, 36.8mm at nut
WEIGHT 3.2kg/7.05lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Satin Black
CONTACT charvel.com

9/10 **In every sense, the sassafras body adds new depth to the San Dimas Superstrat sound**

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

PRO-MOD SAN DIMAS STYLE 1 HSS FR M
PRICE £1,059
DESCRIPTION 6-string double-cutaway electric guitar, made in Mexico
BUILD Alder body, bolt-on graphite-reinforced maple neck with 12-16" compound radius maple fretboard, 22 jumbo frets
HARDWARE Charvel die-cast tuners, Floyd Rose 1000 Series double-locking vibrato bridge and locking nut
ELECTRONICS Seymour Duncan JB TB-4 humbucker (bridge), Custom Flat Strat SSL-6 single-coil (middle), Custom Flat Strat SSL-6 RWRP single-coil (neck), 5-way blade selector switch, master volume, no-load tone control
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 44.4mm at nut, 53.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.1mm at 1st fret, 21.1mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 52.9mm at bridge, 36.2mm at nut
WEIGHT 3.7kg/8.16lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Platinum Pearl gloss

8/10 **A consummate 1980s rock machine complete with Charvel's customary scything tone**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Kramer 84 **£749**
EVH 5150 Standard **£749**
Ibanez AZ226-BKF AZ **£1,049**

MADE IN AMERICA

CUSTOM
Heritage
Guitar Inc.
SHOP

A SYMBOL OF WORLD-CLASS EXCELLENCE

Handcrafted at 225 Parsons St, Kalamazoo, the Heritage Custom Core H-150 features premium tonewoods, handwound proprietary humbuckers and vintage components for an unrivaled playing experience.

There's nothing finer than a Heritage Custom

FIND OUT MORE AT HERITAGEGUITARS.COM/CUSTOM-SHOP

FENDER
FENDER

Step change: the two-tier headstock design is a Fano callback

Block party: aged pearloid block inlays adorn the ebony fingerboard

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,425 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION 6-string semi-hollow electric guitar, made in Korea
BUILD Pressed maple top and back, mahogany frame and weight-relieved centre-block, bound ebony 12" radius fingerboard with 24 medium-jumbo frets and aged pearloid block inlays
HARDWARE Nickel Nashville tune-o-matic steel-saddle bridge and stoptail, staggered vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS 2 x Rivolta Brevetto humbuckers, master volume and tone, 3-way toggle switch
SCALE LENGTH 25"/635mm
NECK WIDTH 43.1mm at nut, 51.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.7mm at 1st fret, 24.2mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36mm at nut, 51.9mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.8kg/8.3lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Camino Burst (as reviewed), Rosso Red, Acero Glow, Toro Black, Toro Black with gold hardware
CONTACT rivoltaguitars.com, coda-music.com

RIVOLTA
REGATA VII

WORDS ED OLESZKO

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

The latest instrument in the Dennis Fano-designed Rivolta range is this stylish 24-fret offset twist on the traditional semi-hollowbody

Whether it's had Novo or Rivolta emblazoned on the headstock, we've been consistently wowed by the sheer quality of everything we've played from the Dennis Fano stable, Needless to say, then, upon sliding the new Regata VII from its sturdy Rivolta-branded gigbag, the anticipation is palpable – and once again Dennis does not disappoint.

Despite being a sizeable guitar with a pressed maple top and back, a mahogany frame and a weight-relieved centre-block, the Regata VII's clever offset design means it nestles comfortably when seated but also balances superbly on a strap. All controls sit intuitively within reach and there are roadworthy touches such as shielding on the output jack plate and the rear cavity control plate (whose mere existence on a semi should have techs jumping for joy).

Atop the set mahogany neck, the two-tier headstock design is new to Rivolta but a clear nod to the eponymous brand with which Fano made his name. The six-a-side, back-angled design also offers a straight, unimpeded string path behind the nut and lends the Regata VII something of a Trini Lopez vibe – never a bad thing.

IN USE

Despite its semi-hollow construction, unplugged the Regata VII leans more towards a solidbody tonality than it does the delicate and airy charms of a vintage ES-335. That's not to say it won't be just the ticket for smooth jazz but there's a robustness to the construction and tone that begs for a more aggressive approach – one that's more Foos than blues, if you will.

Plug the Regata VII into a cleanish tweed combo and the Brevetto

Take control: the wiring is simple, with just a single volume and tone

Gaining ground: the Brevetto humbuckers are toneful and versatile

humbucking pickups have a sophistication that you don't often find in this price range, with their PAF-like sweetness and airy top end, plus plenty of bite in the lower strings.

Step on a gain pedal and the best-of-both-worlds 25-inch scale length makes perfect sense; the added snap and tautness gives low-position rock riffs a defined, punchy edge. Drop D riffs exhibit a snappy transient attack with ample sustain and clarity aplenty again from the excellent humbuckers, even under some serious additional pedal or amp gain.

The comfortable C-shaped neck is adorned with striking aged pearloid markers on a smooth 12-inch radius ebony 'board, and 24 superbly crowned medium-jumbo frets. In addition, it offers improved upper-fret access, meaning the Regata VII is able to excel not just as a rhythm instrument but as a lead machine too, allowing you to venture into territory usually inhibited by ES-style designs.

To create a new design that feels familiar yet is diverse enough to cover just about any gig, from a jazz bar to a rock show, is no mean feat. In addition, there's a traditional tonal palette on offer with few of the playability compromises that make handling a big semi an unwieldy prospect for some players.

In this gorgeous Camino Burst and with such outstanding pickups and playability, the Regata straddles the divide between modern practicality and vintage tone. It seems to be bread-and-butter for Dennis Fano, but very few other contemporary electric guitar designers manage this.

Our only gripe is that, as with any twin-humbucker guitar and especially with pickups as good as these, there are a wealth of subtle flavours that could be unlocked if the Regata had been fitted with independent volume and tone controls for each pickup. Here's hoping for a traditional four-control circuit on the Regata VIII!

9/10 **Dennis Fano's hitmaking streak continues with this cool, versatile and great-value offset semi**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Vintage VSA500 Reissued **£429**
Epiphone Inspired By Gibson ES-335 Figured **£549**
Eastman Romeo **£1,999**

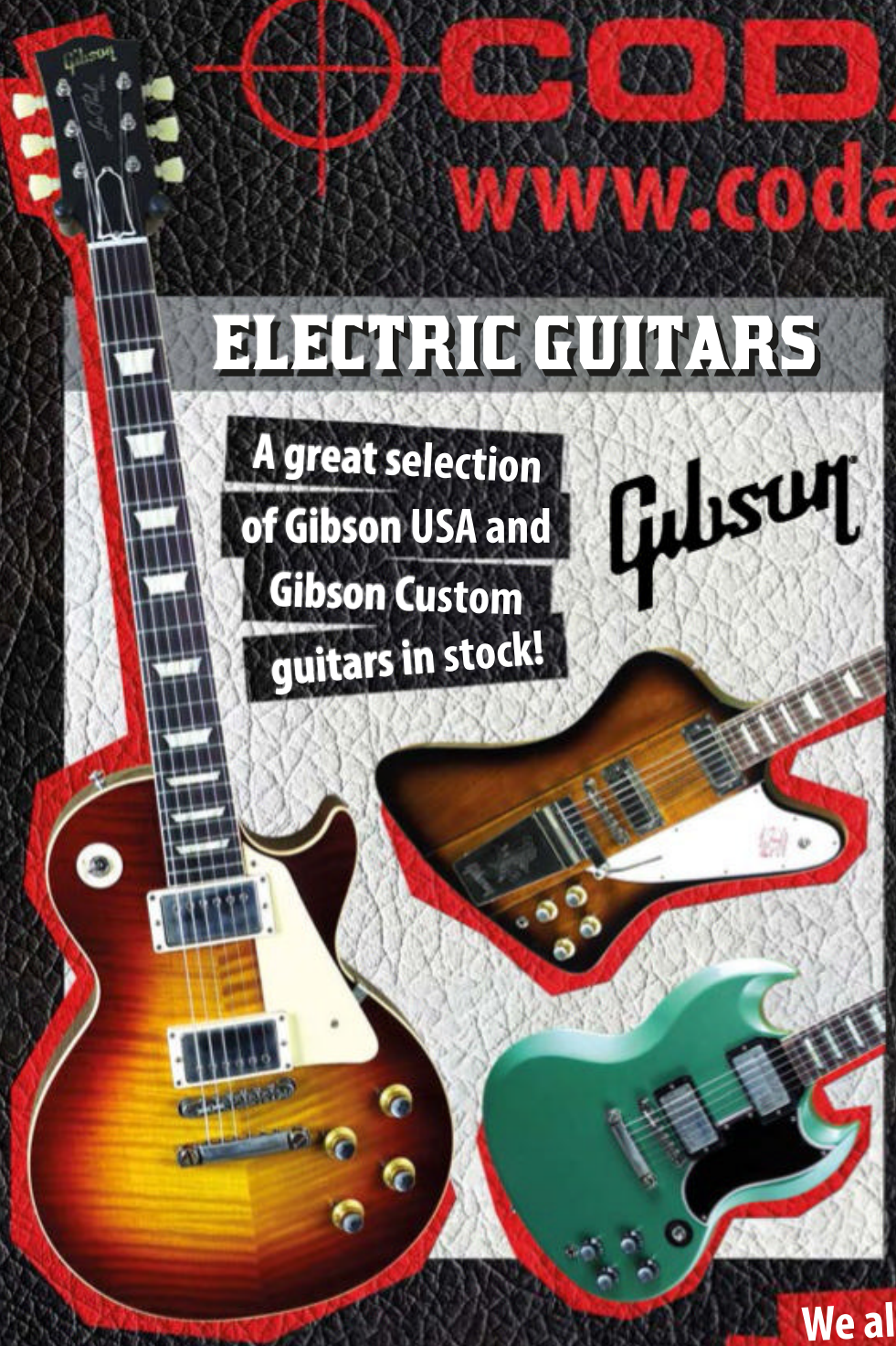
CODAMUSIC

www.coda-music.com

ELECTRIC GUITARS

A great selection of Gibson USA and Gibson Custom guitars in stock!

Gibson



ACOUSTIC GUITARS

The best collection of Bourgeois guitars in the country!

Bourgeois Guitars

We also stock a wide range of secondhand gear!

AMPLIFIERS

We stock, Fender, Tone King, Two Rock, Mesa/Boogie and many more. All sizes, all budgets!

EFFECTS

Every effect imaginable, Boss, MXR, Origin, Walrus plus everything else in between, all in stock!

Make sure you follow us on social media for all the latest news and updates!

@coda_music_stevenage

51a High Street, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 3AH t : 01438 350 815 e : stevenage@coda-music.co.uk
Acoustic Centre 27b Church Lane, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 3QW t: 01438 350815 e: acoustics@coda-music.com

Instant decision 9 months 0% finance
available on all new products over £300 on our website

vol
blend
gain
II
III
IV
bass
mode
treb
ERAS
WALRUS
AUDIO

By the horns: the pedal's five modes offer a feast of raging drive tones

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £179
DESCRIPTION Five-mode distortion pedal, made in the USA
CONTROLS Volume, clean blend, gain, bass, five-way mode switch, treble
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt mains supply only (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS 126 x 67 x 58mm
CONTACT walrusaudio.com, face.be

WALRUS AUDIO ERAS

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

With their latest compact device, the stompbox sultans of Oklahoma City want to help you unleash your inner rock beast – in five different directions

Have you ever heard a real-life walrus? They make quite a racket, so it's only fitting that there should be room in Walrus Audio's eclectic pedal line-up for a bit of good old-fashioned noisemongering. And that's where the Eras comes in.

Just as our tusked marine mammal can manipulate its vocal cords to create a wide variety of sounds, this 'five-state distortion' offers multiple flavours of high-gain dirt, via a rotary mode switch found between the bass and treble controls.

This Walrus may not have tusks but the winged bull on its top panel does sport four horns, offering a clue as to its aggressive intent. Mind you, it does also feature a blend control for dialling some of your clean tone back in – handy for when things get too wild.

The other two knobs are for output volume and gain. But before we saddle up this raging bull, let's take a closer look at what that five-way switch is actually doing.

The first two settings are described as "tight" modes with a slight cut to the midrange, the first using LED hard clipping and the second silicon. The third mode is LED and silicon combined. Modes four and five are recommended for rhythm playing and have a more pronounced mid-scoop and the same choice between LED and silicon clipping.

In terms of design, the Eras is clearly a sister pedal to the Walrus Audio Ages, an overdrive with a similar control array, including dry blend and a five-way mode switch. Back in our August 2020 issue, we called the Ages "an engaging toolbox of quality filth", so the Eras is certainly not short of pedigree.

IN USE

Well, that bull sounds as angry as he looks. In mode one, with the blend fully open and everything else pointing straight up, we get a raw and raspy distortion that's well suited to palm-muting chuggathons. The treble control can add absolutely vicious bite if you want it and, with gain maxed out, we find ourselves straying into extreme fuzz territory, complete with near-endless sustain on single high notes.

The differences between the first three modes are surprisingly subtle, thickening things up as we go around rather than radically transforming the nature of the distortion. But there's a more noticeable shift when you flip over to the two scooped settings. It isn't an exaggerated midrange cut – this is not a Metal Muff – but it's enough to make solos sit in a very different space.

The blend control allows you restore some of the warmth and clarity of your clean sound and is a welcome addition. Just don't dial it back too far: with more dry than wet signal, the distortion can start to sound like little more than a grubby background fizz.

One more tip: if possible, pair this thing with a high-wattage amplifier. Some amps are better pedal platforms than others – and the Eras is precisely the type of pedal that benefits from increased power: this bull is happiest when he's got some headroom to charge around in.

8/10 **A quality noise-bringer with plenty of gain on tap and some interesting tone-tweaking options**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Revv G3 **£199**
Redbeard Effects Red Mist **£199**
Black Country Customs Monolith **£119**

MOD DEVICES
DWARF

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

A little black brick with a giant brain, the crowdfunded MOD Dwarf promises to bridge the gap between floorboard effects processors and computer-based rig emulations

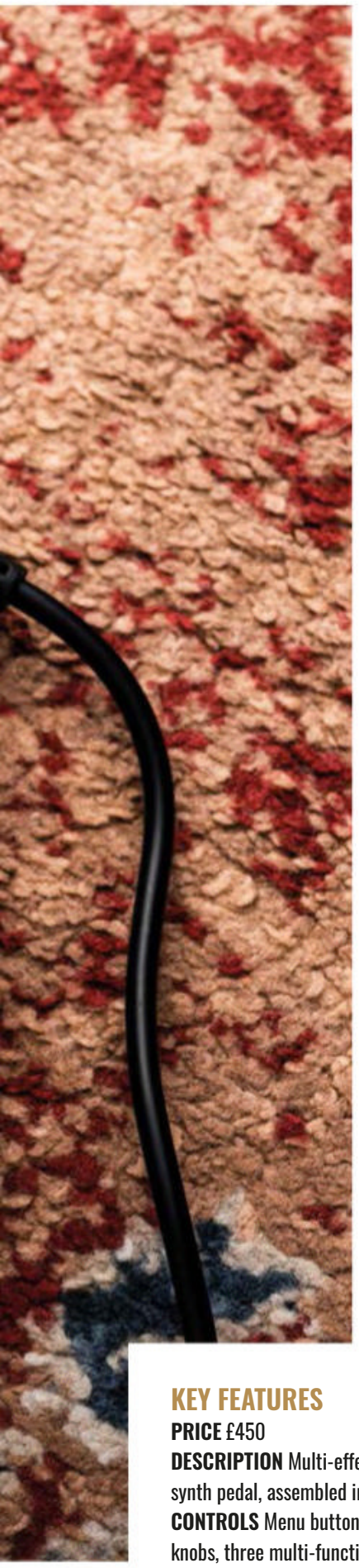
Wouldn't it be great if you could combine the gig-friendly convenience of a compact multi-effects unit with the versatility of desktop pedal and amp emulation software? Well, sure, it might be great. Then again, it might end up being a bit more complicated than that.

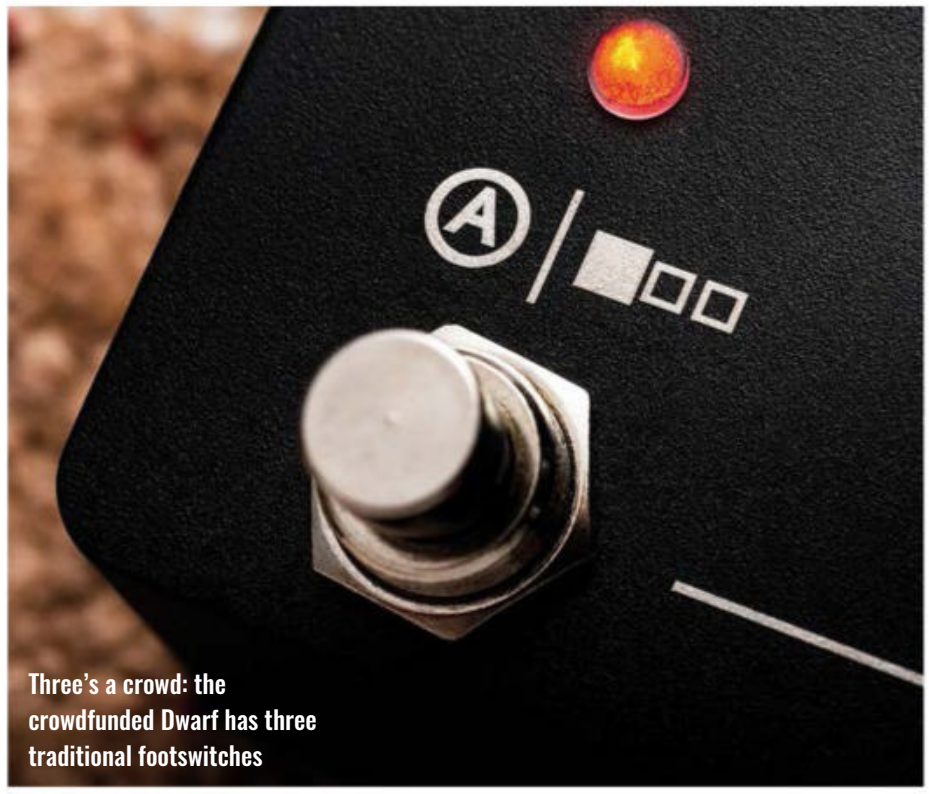
This is the Dwarf, a crowdfunded smart pedal by German company MOD Devices. It feels solidly built and has a reasonably simple user interface – but whether it can compete with the big beasts in this hotly contested field is another matter.

As a stompbox, the Dwarf certainly scores highly for diddiness. Connect it to a PC or Mac via the included USB cable and it offers the kind of deep-level control we're used to seeing in apps such as AmpliTube and ReValver, with little pedals and amps that you drag around the screen and link up via virtual cables.

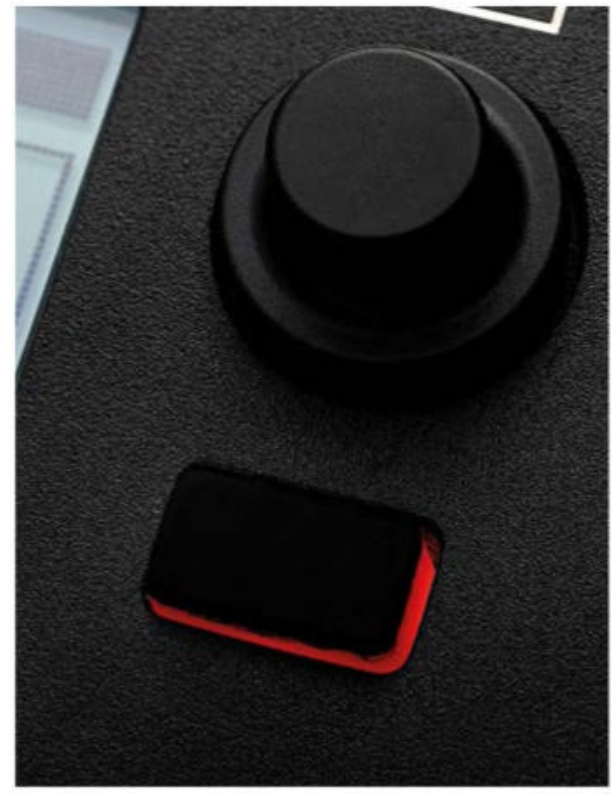
Sound familiar? This approach isn't a million miles away from that of Line 6 and the way it unites real and onscreen worlds with its Helix processors and Helix Native software. The difference is that the MOD's desktop interface is a browser page hosted by the device itself, rather than a plugin. This means that your computer monitor effectively becomes an external screen for the Dwarf, so any changes you make are instantly applied to the unit.

The Dwarf is cheaper than anything in Line 6's Helix range and the system is open-source, allowing users to share boards and collaborate on a vast array of tonal options. On paper at least, this is a very promising proposition.





Three's a crowd: the crowdfunded Dwarf has three traditional footswitches



Open invite: for a small unit, connectivity is comprehensive

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £450
DESCRIPTION Multi-effects, amp sim and synth pedal, assembled in Germany
CONTROLS Menu button, three multi-function knobs, three multi-function push-buttons, three multi-function footswitches
REAR PANEL Stereo jack inputs and outputs, mini-jack MIDI-in and -out, control chain port, USB-A and USB-B, headphone output
FEATURES 3" monochrome LCD display, input and output LED meters, Bluetooth, powered by 12-volt mains supply (included)
DIMENSIONS 201 x 104 x 53mm
CONTACT moddevices.com

IN USE

The available sounds are already hugely diverse and many are excellent, though a fair few of them are only for MIDI synths. Once you've stored some of them via the easily navigable system of banks, pedalboards and snapshots, you'll have a fully portable multi-rig setup for practice, gigging and recording, with or without an amp. There's also scope for deep editing.

The system does throw up its share of frustrations, though. The most significant of them is that, while it's no trouble at all to line up pedals the way you want them, you can't tweak their settings using the Dwarf's knobs, buttons and footswitches until you've assigned each function manually – there are no default controls. The PC interface also isn't as slick as some: there's no grid to snap pedals and amps to, so the screen soon starts to look quite messy; and the signal flows from left to right, somewhat counterintuitive when building a virtual pedalboard.

Selecting pedals from an onscreen collection should feel like you've got a free pass to the sweetshop but the MOD version doesn't really have that all-you-can-eat appeal. For now, at least, the amp selection is less than comprehensive, with just a handful of models hidden among the effects under the rather unhelpful heading 'Simulator'.

Throw in a bit of background noise and it all adds up to a product that perhaps needs a little more refinement before it's ready to blow the multi-effects market wide open. Let's hope that the ongoing input of MOD users across the world helps to make that happen.

7/10 **At this early stage it's not without flaws but the MOD platform shows a lot of potential**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

HeadRush Gigboard **£499**
Line 6 Pod Go **£419**
Boss ME-80 **£219**

THIMBLE WASP EFFECTS

TIME LAPSE, SPACE CAMP & ANVIL

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Offbeat graphics, intriguing names and radical circuits? Maybe we can make room in our lives for yet another small-scale American stompbox brand after all

The words 'thimble' and 'wasp' don't exactly conjure up thoughts of expansive and mellifluous guitar tone, do they? But we like to keep an open mind whenever new indie pedal makers come along – and, in this case, that turns out to be entirely justified. Thimble Wasp Effects is one to watch.

Built in Columbus, Ohio, these three units – a multi-mode delay, a fuzz with added vibrato or reverb, and an extremely mean-looking overdrive – are as diverse in sound as they are in styling. One thing they all have in common, however, is a quirky and adventurous spirit. You'll find no clones or faithful tributes here.

On a more practical note, all three pedals benefit from reassuringly tidy build quality, with true-bypass and pop-free soft switching. By US boutique standards, their retail prices are very reasonable too.

The Time Lapse catches our eye first, thanks to green 'underglow' lighting that gives it the look of a pimped-up Mazda that would rather be doing donuts in a car park. This is a digital delay with tap tempo and eight operating modes, some a lot more unconventional than others. The Space Camp is an interesting hybrid, combining a two-mode fuzz (standard or octave) with a digital element that can be switched between pure pitch-vibrato and reverb. And that leaves the Anvil, which is nothing

more than a JFET overdrive… albeit one with some interesting tone controls.

The Thimble Wasp name, by the way, comes from a line in Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451*. Great book, but you don't need to have read it to like the pedals.

IN USE

The top panel of the Time Lapse has an appealing lo-fidelity sci-fi look but it is a bit of a 'mare to read. It's just as well, then, that this unit comes with a laminated card that lists its eight modes and how the controls work in each of them.

It turns out to be a pedal of two halves. Modes one to four cover simple repeats with adjustable modulation and tape-style degradation, while five to eight take in reverse delay, two patterns of glitchy, fluttering up-octaves, and an addictive hold option that lets you freeze a gently modulating chord with the tap switch then play dry notes over the top.

Each mode brings a certain amount of operating noise but we've heard worse, and there are eminently usable sounds to explore here. It's not a comprehensive library of delay textures, just an inviting toy box of tones.

The same can be said of the Space Camp, which is a much more creatively powerful device than you might think possible from a compact enclosure with four knobs and one toggle switch. Beginning with vibrato depth all the way down, we get a standard fluffy fuzz with decent touch-sensitivity and a wide gain range. But dial in a dollop of modulation and the woozy pitch-wobble turns everything alien. Full-on freakiness is not necessarily the best use of this effect pairing, however. High gain and low depth is fantastic for adding near-subliminal movement to edgy lead playing.

Pushing the depth up to halfway, the vibrato suddenly drops back to zero as the pedal flips into octave fuzz mode. In true Foxx Tone Machine style, it's raspy and belligerent, and turning up the wobbles again just piles on even more wildness.

Had the Space Camp's abilities ended there, we would've been more than happy. But now we get to do all that again with

Pitch a tent: with fuzz, vibrato and reverb, the Space Camp has lots to offer

High time: the Time Lapse's eight modes cover many kinds of delay

reverb instead of vibrato. In short, it sounds absolutely epic – yet without ever swamping the dry signal, thanks to a nicely judged pre-delay. We don't know if they have surf bands on Mars but, if so, this is the pedal they need.

After all that, a simple overdrive has to be an anticlimax, and the Anvil does seem like the odd one out here. It doesn't do anything zany or extreme, and the unit's tasteful tones are something of a mismatch for the ultra-metal connotations of its name and artwork.

None of that stops this being a solid dirt machine, though. The Anvil is a more or less transparent drive that runs all the way from an almost clean boost to a meaty medium-gain roar. The tone knob is a powerful treble-tweaker but the Voice control is the secret weapon, sharpening the upper midrange to give you as much bite as you need.

Based on this disparate bundle, we're not yet sure what to make of Thimble Wasp. But there's clearly some brilliance at work here, and the Space Camp is a gem by any standards. G

Steel trap: the Anvil has bite but don't expect heavy metal

KEY FEATURES

TIME LAPSE
PRICE £175
DESCRIPTION Multi-mode digital delay pedal, made in the USA
CONTROLS Eight-way rotary mode switch, character, time, mix, feedback; bypass and tap-tempo footswitches
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9V mains supply only (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS 120 x 98 x 56mm
CONTACT thimblewasp.com, southendmusicexchange.co.uk

8/10 **Covers most standard delay needs and adds an interesting selection of more elaborate effects**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Walrus Audio D1 **£279**
Line 6 DL4 **£219**
GFI System Orca **£199**

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

SPACE CAMP
PRICE £150
DESCRIPTION Fuzz, vibrato and reverb pedal, made in the USA
CONTROLS Rate, depth, gain, volume, vibrato/reverb toggle switch
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9V mains supply only (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS 114 x 71 x 51mm

9/10 **Truly ingenious: a seemingly innocent fuzzbox with digital additions that introduce all manner of mayhem**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Keeley Monterey **£279**
SolidGoldFX Lysis **£229**
Catalinbread Antichthon **£149**

KEY FEATURES

ANVIL
PRICE £120
DESCRIPTION Overdrive pedal, made in the USA
CONTROLS Gain, volume, voice, tone
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9V mains supply only (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS 114 x 71 x 47mm

8/10 **Not as scary as it looks, honest – just a solid overdrive with plenty of tonal flexibility in the top end**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Wampler Belle **£139**
MXR Timmy **£139**
Fulltone OCD **£129**

INDUSTRY INSIDER

PARAGRAM GUITARS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Mexican designer and luthier Carlos Ortiz has developed a distinctive brand that pays homage to time-tested designs while carving out space for contemporary user-friendly flavours – all aided by the support and guidance of the wider guitar community

How did you get into guitar?

"Music has always been important and I've always been fixated on the guitar in particular, from watching videos on MTV and admiring the guitarists in my favourite bands. I knew I had to get my hands on a guitar and learn how to play my favourite songs."

When did you start building or tinkering with guitars?

"Around the time I got my first guitar, a Yamaha bundle, when I was 14 or 15. I was so curious to know how it worked, so I took it apart and put it together again. I did this several times and then again with my second guitar, an Epiphone Les Paul. I'm so glad I didn't break any truss rods! When I was studying industrial design, I realised a guitar was something I could make, so one summer I took it as a project. I chose a Telecaster for its simplicity, and went to town researching books, YouTube, and online forums on how to build a guitar. At that time, building a neck seemed beyond my skillset so I just made a body and bought a pre-made neck. When I graduated college, I already had the idea of making a guitar of my own design. I was on a quest to design what I thought was the perfect guitar to me – aesthetic, ergonomic, simple, while taking into account tradition. This time I had to make the neck. I almost had it figured out but I still needed some guidance. I found a local luthier, owner of Olmos Guitars, and he mentored me and taught me what I still lacked."

When did you realise you had a viable business?

"Almost from the beginning. In college I took some business classes, and there I started looking into the viability of the project, then when I arrived at my final design, I spent time doing validation on specialised Facebook groups, and made an Instagram profile for the brand. I saw good response and started from there."

Did you have any external investment starting out?

"I started with my own money. The family business makes furniture, and it was easy to pivot from that. I am lucky to have access to a CNC and some equipment that helped me get started. But I started small, made an instrument, sold it, then with that money bought more equipment and tools, made another one, sold it and so on."

When did you feel like you'd nailed your branding?

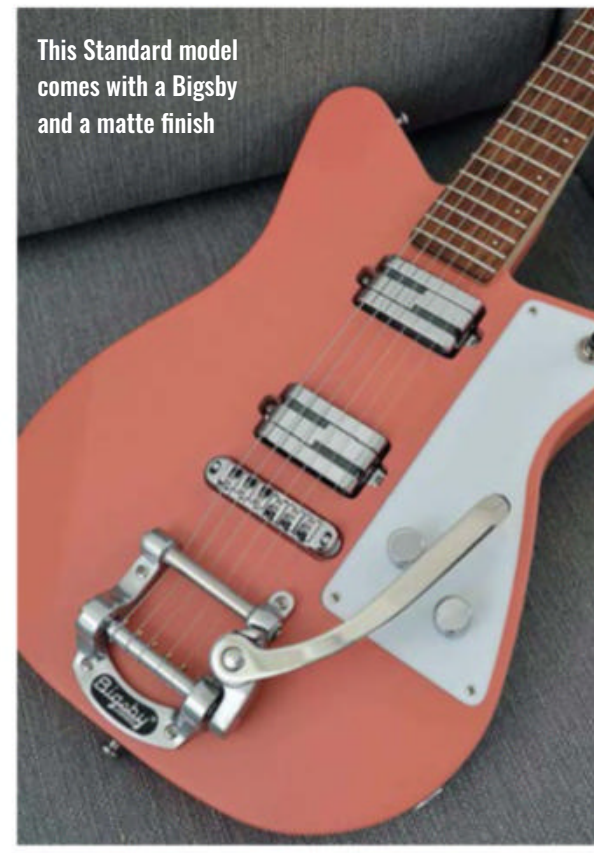
"When I arrived at my first design, my Standard model, I knew the design had to be the centrepiece of it all, so once I had that, all my branding, brand identity, etc, started falling into place."

What did you draw inspiration from when designing the Standard?

"I drew a lot of inspiration from mid-century modern furniture and minimalism. One of the things I wanted to achieve with the instruments was that, apart from being a tool to make music, the instruments could be decoration for the homes they resides in, like a sculpture or a piece of art. Moving to the guitar world, the works of Millimetric, Frank Brothers and Fender were influential in the aesthetic and construction process."

This Paragram Standard has a P-90 in the neck position

Paragram's S-type Continua features a radical approach to the control layout


This Standard model comes with a Bigsby and a matte finish

You've also updated familiar designs with a modern, streamlined control plate. What was the thinking behind this?

"I wanted to pay homage to Leo Fender's classic design, in the same way an artist might cover a song by updating it sonically with their own style. There's a functional and practical reason too: I wanted to solve a tedious problem of working with a Strat, and that is if you ever want to rewire the guitar or change a pot or add a switch, you have to take the strings off, unscrew a dozen screws and de-solder the ground wire. But with my design, you don't have to take the strings off, there's only a few screws, and you have more space to add controls if the client requires; all the controls are organised in a tidy way."

What's your proudest moment as a maker?

"I'm just really proud to have a design that people like and that they can make their own. Even though it's my design, people have the opportunity to customise it to channel their own personality."

How has the guitar community helped you develop Paragram as a brand?

"I have learnt a lot of the craft's tricks and trade secrets from following and messaging other luthiers who are more than happy to share their knowledge. You learn a lot from client feedback too, about what works and what doesn't. It's a very supportive and constructive community that is very curious and receptive when it comes to trying and adopting new ideas, and you can see this in the surge of new and exciting guitar brands and guitar-related products that are on the market right now."

What's next for Paragram?

"I want to expand my line of products. I want to introduce a short-scale bass and to make every iteration of my Standard/Agave model – something similar to what Fender is doing with its Parallel Universe series. I've also been working on a model that uses something that's never been seen before. I can't give you any details right now so you'll have to stick around and see if I can pull it off." G

Follow Paragram Guitars on Instagram @paragramguitars

SHOP TALK

GENE BAKER OF B3 GUITARS

A former employee of the Fender Custom Shop, Gibson and Premier Builder's Guild, Gene Baker's guitars blend vintage influences with cutting-edge tech

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

As a kid growing up in the 1970s, if the guitar was to be your destiny, you could do a lot worse than to be born in Detroit 'Motor City' Michigan, and have a best friend whose older cousin was in a band that played nothing but Kiss songs. So it was for Gene Baker, who was driven inexorably towards rock from a young age, and towards building the tools of rock at an age not much older than that.

Once playing turned into making, Baker found himself taking high-school woodworking classes and that infallible smash-and-rebuild route of dissecting and getting into the guts of budget-friendly imports. In order to learn more about the craft, he absorbed every ounce of knowledge he could from magazines, the scant books available, and reluctant local guitar repairmen. Like many a young American guitar fanatic, he was driven to study at the Guitar Institute of Technology (GIT), part of Hollywood's Musicians Institute. Baker emerged at the tender age of 19 thinking he would play the guitar for a living – only to soon decide that trekking to Alaska and back in a low-paying cover band was less conducive to a happy life and stable relationships than sitting tight and repairing and building guitars for himself.

After a post-GIT stint repairing guitars and giving lessons at a music shop in Huntsville, Alabama, Baker returned to California to take a position with one of the biggest names in the industry. This initial brush with factory production didn't go entirely to plan.

"I took a job at Ernie Ball as a sander," he tells us. "Apparently I was too slow and was let go – so I put my parents' garage into full-gear, continuing to build guitars with or without anyone's help." Along the way, Baker picked up pointers from friends he made at Ernie Ball, including Dudley Gimpel. This led to a short partnership with Eric Zollener, with whom Baker created Mean Gene Guitar Services in 1988, which comprised a retail shop, rehearsal spaces, repairs and custom builds.

"We were starting to get decent at guitar building and produced a few pretty cool guitars that are still around today, yet still with no real guidance," says Baker. "Around this time, there was one new book that caught my eye: *Build Your Own Electric Guitar* by Melvyn Hiscock. It featured bolt-on, set-neck and neck-through-body construction from a basic tools standpoint. Oddly, the book was written and photographed in the shop of his boss, Roger Giffin, based in England, who later would become my boss."

After the implosion of Mean Gene Guitars, Baker became a press operator in the print business for a time but continued building guitars on his own, until his love of the craft drove him to seek out full-time employment in the biz. At the time, transplanted British luthier Roger Giffin just happened to be heading the Gibson West Custom Shop in Los Angeles. Giffin took a chance on Baker in 1991 when, as Baker puts it, "my real training would begin".

Then, with a hefty chunk of grade-A Giffin tutelage under his belt, in 1993 Baker took a job at the Fender Custom Shop in Corona, California, where he worked alongside legendary FCS builders John English, Jay Black, Steve Stern, Todd Krause, John Suhr, John Page, and several others. While rising to the position of Senior Master Builder and crafting instruments for the likes of Robben Ford and Ronnie Montrose, Baker also went to night school to study computer-aided design (CAD), eventually becoming prolific in the skill. Meanwhile, much of this time he was moonlighting on his own designs in his builder pal Gil Vasquez's garage, until he gathered the wherewithal to go out on his own again. Baker Guitars was officially born.

GUITAR DREAMS

One of the great challenges for any fledgling guitar maker is that of coining an original design. Baker leaned into this one early in his career, and came up with what's arguably become a modern classic, even if he acknowledges the significant influences that helped him get there.

"As busy as I was working at Fender in 1994," he says, "during our first year in Gil's garage, I laid out the design for what was to become our most popular model, the Baker B1, now known as the B3 SL model. This was still before I learnt CAD, so during my schooling I would transfer pencil data into electronic data and start documenting my design changes, printing full-size drawings for template-making, rather than just waiting for the day I would get my first CNC machine."

Design-wise, Baker says that much of what we favour is based on the players we listen to and the gear they play – desires that he uses to his advantage. "I do try to utilise what I may call cool, sexy, classic arcs and lines in design, the way the automotive world updates models' bodies," he says. "So I think that is kinda what so many of us do to the models we may be leaning on, like how so many hit songs include

stolen sections from other great songs: we emulate what we love in our designs or in our playing."

With the B1 in particular, Baker was conscious of walking in the footsteps of another modern classic, which itself had been created through the merging of existing archetypes. And if the Paul Reed Smith shape and feature-set was huge in the mid-90s, that's arguably because it presented something players could easily latch onto and run with.

"My B1 model wasn't too much of a departure even from what PRS did," says Baker. "But I was aiming at what makes a Les Paul great in the recipe department, regarding all portions used. We were both targeting the marriage of a Strat and a Les Paul, as anything close to an iconic model isn't too frightening to anyone. Like rock 'n' roll; if you sound similar to AC/DC or ZZ Top, you should do just fine. But my passion was embedded into the '59 Les Paul and all things cool about vintage Gibson models: Vs, Explorers, the Moderne, Firebirds, and so on. But then you take Leo Fender as the father of a great format for modification, find a way to blend the two and you can lean into any direction you want in styling and dress codes. But my heart was focused on a the Les Paul carve top, set neck, binding, inlays, all the bells and whistles. For me, that was building a modern-day violin: it took skill, more so than a slab-o-caster. But, as we all know, there's a lot of skill in any Fender-like model as well, just very different build approaches and material costs."

PREMIER LEAGUE

By about 2006, Baker's B3 guitars were built under the sole proprietorship Fine Tuned Instruments, in a line-up that included the B1-based SL, the Fire – based on his Robben Ford Signature model – and the Phoenix. The latter, says Baker, "merged the Telecaster and the Firebird in a very appealing model that became one of the benchmarks of what became B3 guitars".

"IT WAS EXHAUSTING YET VERY REWARDING. PBG WAS NOT A PRODUCTION SHOP – IT WAS A HIGH-END CUSTOM SHOP, TO SAY THE LEAST"

Just a few years later, though, a major change was in the works, not only for Baker himself but for a host of similarly well-respected small-shop makers.

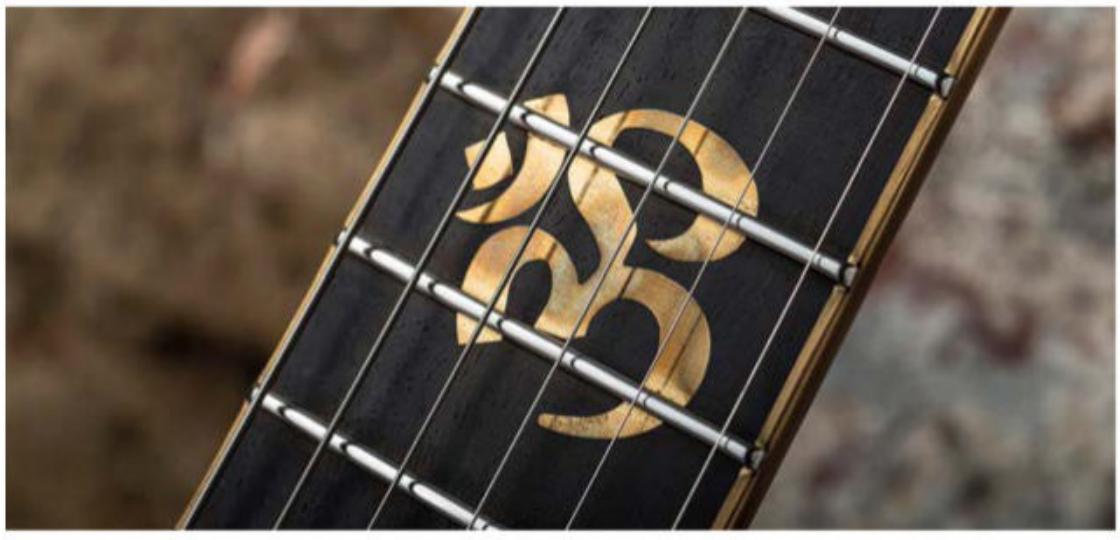
In 2009, the Premier Builder's Guild (PBG) was formed by guitar industry entrepreneurs Howard Swimmer and Michael Bernstein, with the goal of providing more accessible team-built renditions of boutique electric guitars. The California facility would turn out its own versions of guitars designed by Dennis Fano, Saul Koll, Jason Schroeder, Roger Giffin, and Johan Gustavsson, as well as Baker's B3 models – and Swimmer and Bernstein hired Baker to head the team and oversee production.

While PBG took a few hits on vociferous guitar forums for the fact that its guitars were not actually hand-made by the people whose names were on the headstocks, Baker's oversight of a team of skilled builders ensured that the facility produced a wide range of consistently great instruments. Whatever corporate tentacles were inferred by some, most who actually owned and played the guitars were happy. The venture folded in 2016, and the various brands it produced ended up in other hands or back with their namesakes. Still, Baker took away plenty of positives from the experience.

"That was a time for engineering in overdrive," he says. "Having to clone all those different builders, reverse-engineering so many guitars handed to you in different formats, and maintain their energy and do justice to their brands was exhausting, yet very rewarding. And we did it! That was not a production shop; it was a high-end custom shop, to say the least."

Since then, Baker has been out on his own again and at the helm of the fully revitalised B3 Guitars.

The B3 UltraModern demonstrates Gene Baker's commitment to pushing boundaries



His current facility comprises a four-man crew working in a 3,400 square-foot shop in Tehachapi, California, while his business partner, Michael Brandt Rinkenberger, handles the sales and marketing.

BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

Add together Baker's experience under Giffin at Gibson, the Fender Custom Shop, PBG, and his ongoing independent ventures, and that's a lot of intimate exploration of the finer points of high-end guitar making. So what insights can he share on some of the seemingly small things that can really make a difference… or not?

"As guitar builders know," says Baker, "wood is unpredictable yet is such a beautiful material, so how do we make it more stable? One of the things, which isn't necessarily new but has made a big difference, is graphite reinforcement in the neck. Since we've been offering graphite in our more modern models I've noticed how stable they remain during machining steps, which directly translates to less tuning problems. And I do like to keep up with new developments from parts makers, like Sophia Tremolos reinventing the Floyd trem, or Fishman Fluence pickups tapping into new technology to make old and new sounds. That's really the guitar nerd in me, just checking out all that's out there, the lifelong tone quest."

But despite all these tricks and tools, for Baker the process of getting it right begins at the beginning – quite literally at the drawing board.

"Drawing, to me, is the start of everything, even if it's a giant piece of paper," he says. "Establish centre lines, measure everything with precision rulers and dial callipers, and draw it perfectly in the front, rear and side views. Take that to a blueprint copy shop and then you're making templates out of Masonite. But you work everything out in the math first, so you draw to scale and figure out problems before it's too late."

When it comes to turning these drawings into instruments, though, Baker's first love is still with the raw materials that form the foundation of every build. "I love staying in the wood shop, basically right from the beginning," he adds. "All CAD programming, R&D, running the CNC, making sure all parts spec correctly, inlay, final shaping then hand-off to my apprentice to get sanded ready for paint. I love all of it!

"For many, there's so much lost art from old-school technologies, yet for newbies there's this enormous set of new tools. So, creativity is the mother of invention. Today, wild things are happening with CNC pushed to the edge for design verses quantity output, plus 3D printers and lasers are all adding so much to the art in a capacity that you just couldn't make efficiently before."

For Baker as for many other builders, it's not easy keeping up with all this new tech. But build quality should always be the priority. "So many things begin with the hands," he says. "As long as I continue to design new things, I feel it keeps us relevant and pushing the envelope as far as we can push guitar evolution, while having a strong footing in the vintage tradition."

Visit b3guitars.com for more

TEISCO

INTERFACE

ACE

INFINITE ROUTING POSSIBILITIES AT YOUR FEET

INTRODUCING THE AUDIO INTERFACE THAT LIVES ON YOUR PEDALBOARD

Run your DAW and favorite studio effects through your amplifier,
and record up to two guitars while you play!

EXPLORE OUR ANALOG PEDAL RANGE

teisco.com @weareteisco

Harmony
SINCE 1892

COMET

Curt Chambers @curtchambers

www.harmony.co
@harmonyguitars

Expand your tonal palette with the infinitely playable **Harmony Comet.**

DIY WORKSHOP

HOW TO ADJUST YOUR TRUSS ROD

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

If you understand the limitations of truss rods and how to adjust them safely, it's easy to do it yourself

Adjusting the truss rod is fundamental to any guitar maintenance routine. But it's widely believed to be dangerous, and even that necks can be ruined in the process. Rest assured: you needn't be afraid of this humble device. But first, some background.

Back in the day, Leo Fender insisted that his earliest necks were so strong that they didn't need truss rods. However, touring musicians returning to California from the Canadian cold soon persuaded him otherwise. Wood responds to heat and humidity by expanding and contracting, and it only takes a very small movement forwards or backwards for that perfect action to become uncomfortably high, or for the strings to begin buzzing on the frets.

Most guitar manufacturers realised this when steel strings became the norm and necks needed to withstand greater tension as a result. In 1934, Martin began installing a steel T-bar to maintain neck straightness, and other manufacturers followed suit with their own versions. But necks would still bow under tension, so manufacturers still felt obliged to produce fat necks to minimise the issue.

Gibson had quite literally been ahead of the curve. Employee Thaddeus McHugh invented an adjustable steel truss rod and filed for a patent in 1921. When US Patent #1446758 was granted in 1923, it allowed Gibson to carve much slimmer necks than its competitors.

Most truss rods only act in one direction, so they're primarily intended to correct up-bows. But necks can also develop back-bows, so dual-action truss rods were developed to allow neck adjustment in both directions.

WHEN TO ADJUST

Every spring and autumn, I get calls from customers saying that their guitars need a setup, with common complaints being high actions, buzzing strings and tuning issues. Often, a full setup isn't required, because the neck is the only thing that's moved and all that's needed to fix it is a minor truss rod adjustment. The same can also apply when trying different string brands or gauges.

1 Placing two capos on the neck makes it easy to gauge the amount of neck relief at the seventh fret

2 Look closely and you'll see that, due to an up-bow, there's a sizeable gap between the seventh fret and the bottom of the string

3 Strings resting on top of the frets indicates too much truss rod tension or maybe even a back-bow

4 Here there's a very slight gap between the seventh fret and the string, so the truss rod is set optimally and the guitar plays nicely

You can assess neck straightness by fretting a string in two places simultaneously – at the first fret and somewhere around the point where the neck joins the body. Using a capo or two can help with this. Look for a gap between the top of the 7th fret and the underside of the string. If there's no gap and you have been experiencing fret buzzing, the neck is probably flat or back-bowed. Conversely, a large gap and a high action might indicate an up-bow.

How neck straightness impacts string height and intonation is fairly easy to visualise. Imagine the neck is totally straight and the strings are running parallel to the fretboard from the nut to the bridge. If truss rod tension is released, the strings will pull the neck into an up-bow, so the nut increases in height relative to the bridge and the strings move higher above the fretboard.

Conversely, an excessively tight truss rod can force the neck into a back-bow, where the nut drops in height relative to the bridge and the strings move towards the fretboard. Neck bows also alter the distance between the nut and bridge, which can cause intonation problems.

Another tell – especially on single-cutaway Les Paul-style guitars – is easy playing up to somewhere around the 16th fret, where the strings begin to buzz and choke. This usually indicates an up-bow that levels out where the neck meets the body. If the bridge has been dropped to compensate for the raised action, the guitar may play nicely, but only up to that point. Straightening the neck and raising the bridge invariably solves the problem while retaining a low action.

5

6

7

5 Gibson truss rods can be adjusted by turning a nut that's hidden under the truss rod cover on the headstock

6 To adjust a Gibson truss rod, you'll need an inexpensive 5/16-inch wrench – one will often come with the guitar

7 For Fender necks with truss rod openings at the headstock, you need a 1/8-inch or 3/16-inch Allen wrench, so check the specs for your guitar

HOW TO ADJUST

First, you need to locate the exposed end of the truss rod. If there's a hole or cover plate next to the nut at the headstock end, that's where you'll be making your adjustments. Vintage-style Fender necks and many acoustics are adjusted from the body end, which can complicate things – but more on that later.

Tightening a truss rod to correct an up-bow involves turning the adjuster clockwise. To correct for a flat neck or a back-bow, the truss rod has to be de-tensioned by turning it counterclockwise and the string tension will complete the job. Whenever possible, always adjust truss rods with the strings tuned to pitch. The principle is fairly simple but here's where you need to be aware of potential dangers…

Truss rods are designed to make minor corrections and are only effective within a fairly narrow range. If your neck's bow is severe, trying to fix it by adjusting the truss rod may end up snapping the rod or stripping the threads on the rod. Either could render the truss rod and the neck itself unusable.

When starting to adjust truss rods, take things slowly, work in increments that do not exceed an eighth of a turn, and allow things time to settle down between adjustments. If you're finding it difficult to turn the rod, stop and leave it to a pro. Similarly, if your adjustments appear to have little effect, or slackening off a truss rod completely doesn't correct a back-bow, just leave it to a professional.

8 On vintage and vintage-style Fender necks, the truss rod is adjusted at the body end using a large cross-head or flathead screwdriver

9 You can adjust vintage Fender-style truss rods without removing the neck, but you'll have to slacken the strings and the neck screws to tilt the neck back

10 This selection of tools can adjust most truss rods. The large L-shaped Allen key is designed to go through acoustic guitar soundholes

A back-bow is never a good thing and you can only get away with a completely straight neck if the frets are perfectly levelled. String displacement is greatest at the midpoint, so for buzz and rattle-free playing, you'll almost certainly need a slight gap between the seventh fret and the string. Feeler gauges can help but going by ear and feel can be just as reliable. You can decide for yourself how much fret noise is tolerable.

Tiny adjustments can make a noticeable difference to tone and playability, and I generally find that guitars ring clearer and sustain for longer when there is some tension on the truss rod. Vintage-style Fender necks present the most problems because the strings generally need to be slackened off and the neck partially lifted out of its pocket in order to adjust the truss rod. Adjusting this type of truss rod should be done in the same way but you might need to pop the neck in and tune to pitch a few times before you arrive at the optimal tension. It's a slow process.

TOOLS YOU NEED

Expensive and highly specialised gadgets are not necessary for truss rod adjustment. But you will need the correct tools. Depending on your guitar, you'll need a large cross-head or flathead screwdriver, and an Allen/hex wrench or a socket wrench. These tools are available online and acquiring an Allen or socket wrench of precisely the right size should ensure you avoid damaging the truss rod nut.

Those acoustics with truss rod access under the soundhole will require a long Allen wrench to pass between the strings and get in deep enough to prevent you scratching the finish. If you're lucky, the guitar's manufacturer will have included the correct tool inside the case. Good luck with your adjustments. Remember to go slow and let us know how you get on.

Visit huwpriceguitar.com for more of Huw's work

Join the
Crimson Guitars
Student Family

CRIMSON
Luthiery School

crimsonguitars.com

AMPLIFIER FAQ

Distortion of the unwanted variety can really kill your buzz. Here, Rift Amplification's Chris Fantana explains what blocking distortion is – and how to get rid of it

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com

Hi, Chris. I recently noticed that my 1958 Fender Deluxe has a nasty, ugly distortion when I push it hard. I'm not sure if it's been like that for a while or if it's a recent thing. Turning down the amplifier does make it go away and the louder the amp is, the worse it gets, and it kinda cuts in and out. I have replaced all valves with new versions and it was recapped a few years back. Any ideas?
Kai, Belgium

Hi, Kai. Sorry to hear about this. It's an unpleasant noise but thankfully I have a solution. That awful distortion that appears when your amplifier is driven hard is likely something called blocking distortion, a phenomenon that occurs when the control grid of a valve is driven to the point of conduction. It normally appears to cut in and out and sits on top of the guitar signal, rather than being a part of it.

Without wanting to get into the technical jargon, what you've done is nothing more than overdrive the valve by too much. That sound is basically the valve crying out, "No more, please!" If you've ever plugged a music player into a hifi and turned the input level up too far, you'll be familiar with the sound.

Usually in a tweed Fender amplifier, blocking distortion occurs in the output valves and can be fixed by a combination of coupling capacitor value reduction and grid-stopper valve increase. However, as your amplifier is a Deluxe model, the problem will be coming not from the 6V6 output valves but from the cathodyne phase-inverter instead.

How do I know this? Because it is a frightfully common issue with both black-panel Princeton Reverbs and 1950s Tweed Deluxes, which also use that phase-inverter circuit. The problem is

FIGURE 1

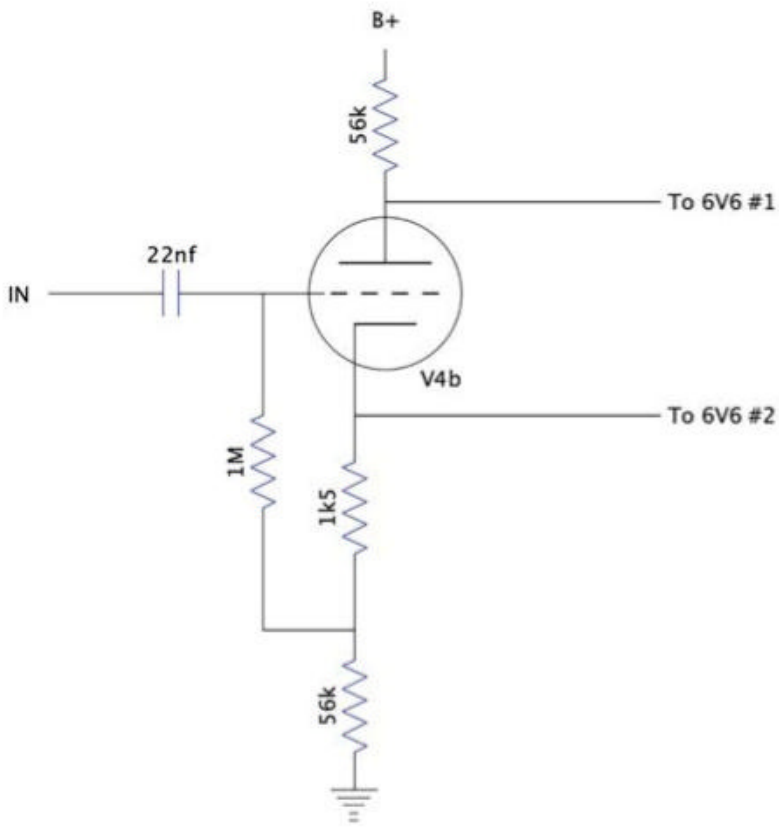
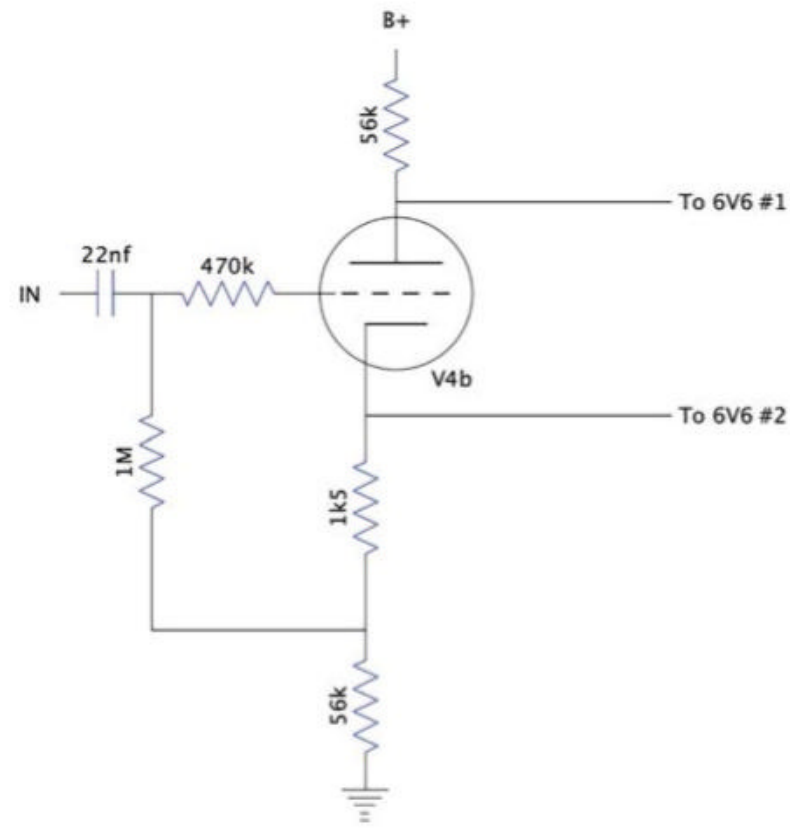
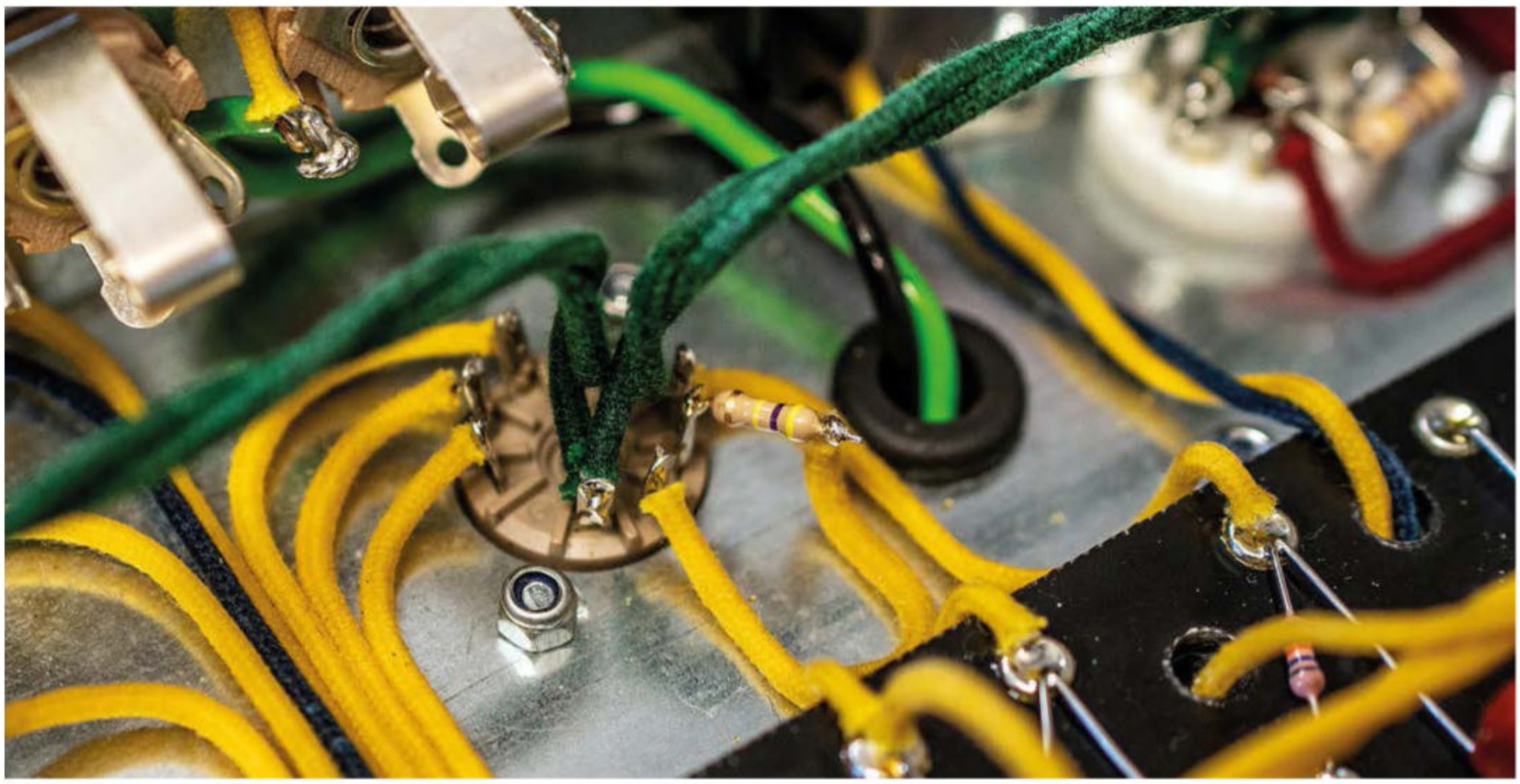


FIGURE 2





Adding an extra resistor won't change the tone, but it will eliminate unwanted blocking distortion

that Fender didn't use a grid-stopper on the control grid of their cathodyne PIs, despite all the technical books saying that you should, for this very reason. Whether this was deliberate or simply an oversight, I cannot say. But thankfully, adding one to the amp is easy and can be reversed if required.

Figure one (above) shows the stock Fender phase-inverter circuit for both the Princeton Reverb and 5E3 Tweed Deluxe, and figure two is the modified version with a 470k resistor sitting between the 22nf capacitor and the valve's control grid.

All you have to do is simply unsolder the wire attached to pin seven of V4 and insert a 470k 1/2w resistor in between, with one end of the resistor soldered to the socket pin and the other to the wire. That's it. I prefer to leave the wire as it is rather than snipping short, in case the mod must be reversed.

So what have we done? By adding this extra resistor, we are limiting the peak current flow into the valve from the source – in this case, the previous gain stage – allowing the PI to be driven hard but without going over its limit. There is zero tonal change here too, so the mod is undetectable.

For owners of Princeton Reverbs, I strongly recommend adding a 470k grid-stopper to the 12AT7 reverb-driver valve (V2), as this fixes several noise issues with that circuit.

As ever, if you're poking around inside a valve amplifier, be careful. Follow simple safety steps such as unplugging it from the wall, measuring and discharging the high-voltage capacitors, and taking your time. If you're unsure, your local tech will be able to help.

Visit riftamps.com for more

© Larry Hulst / Michael Ochs Archives / Getty Images

HEAD TO BANDLAB.COM/GUITAR FOR AUDIO EXAMPLES

FIVE MINUTES TO...

DAVID GILMOUR

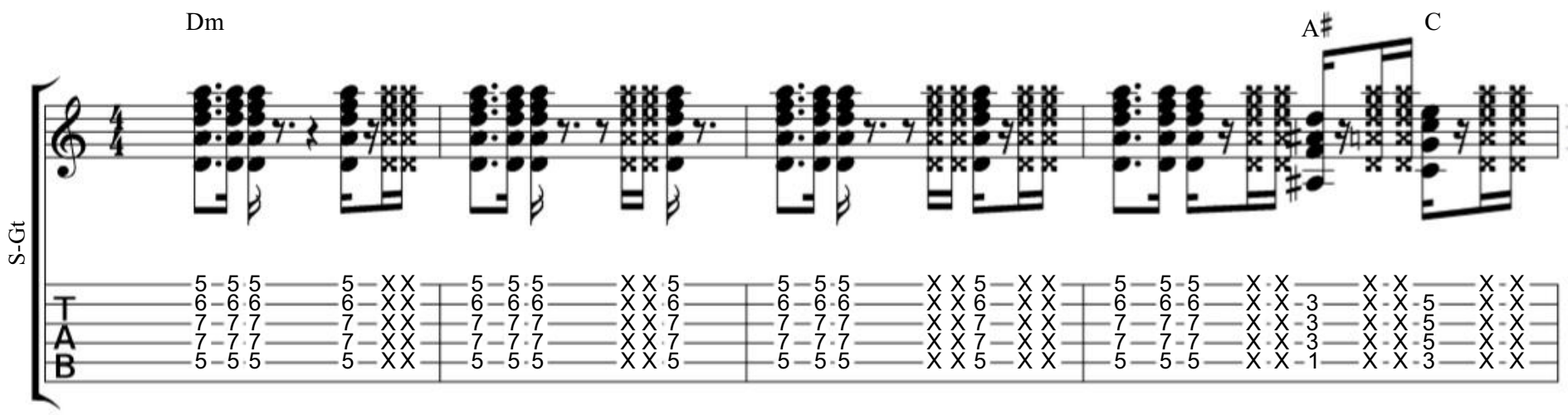
WORDS LEIGH FUGE

Learn to fly with the Pink Floyd icon's rhythm fundamentals, lyrical soloing and enormous bends, all in this five-minute lesson

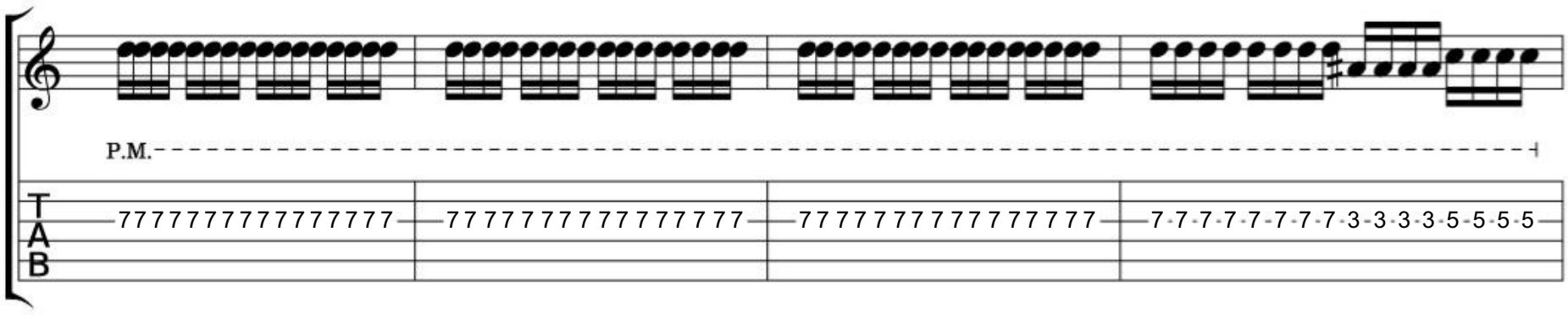
David Gilmour is one of the most revered and imitated guitarists of all time. He's a master of phrasing with a knack for emotive string bends that put most other players to shame. But he's also much more than that. In this lesson, we're digging into funky rhythms, melodic phrasing and, of course, those eye-watering bends. Grab your black Strat and shine on.

GILMOUR-STYLE RHYTHM

The first section of this two-part rhythm is made up of an accented chord line with some muted notes, which forms the main hook of the part. It's based around a D minor chord with a B♭ and C at the end.

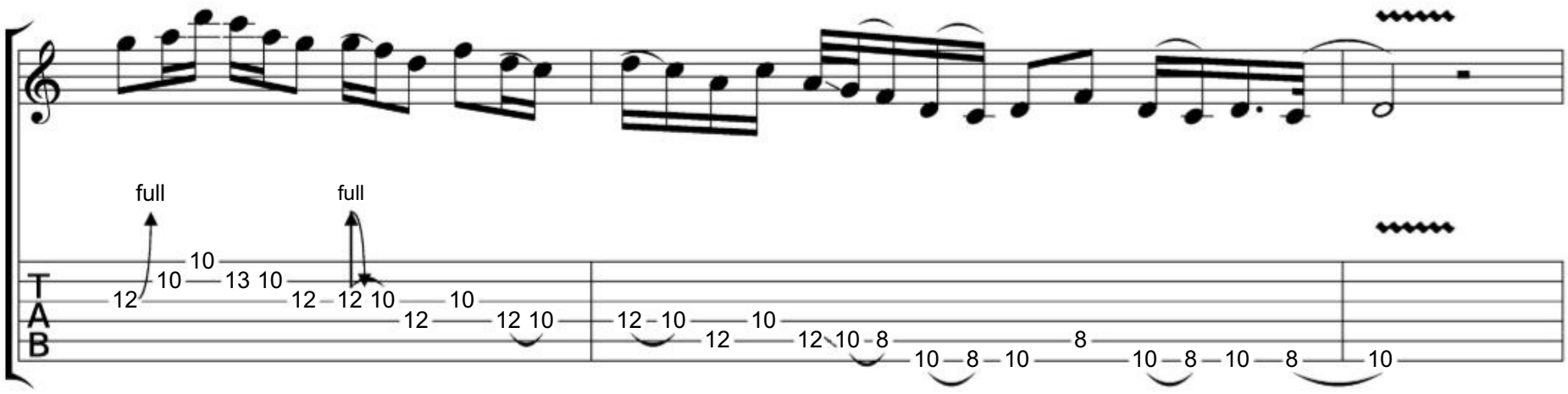


The second part of the rhythm is made up of a subtle, constant 8th note that underpins the chord progression. Play the whole line with palm-muting to maintain a nice, steady pulse beneath the main riff.



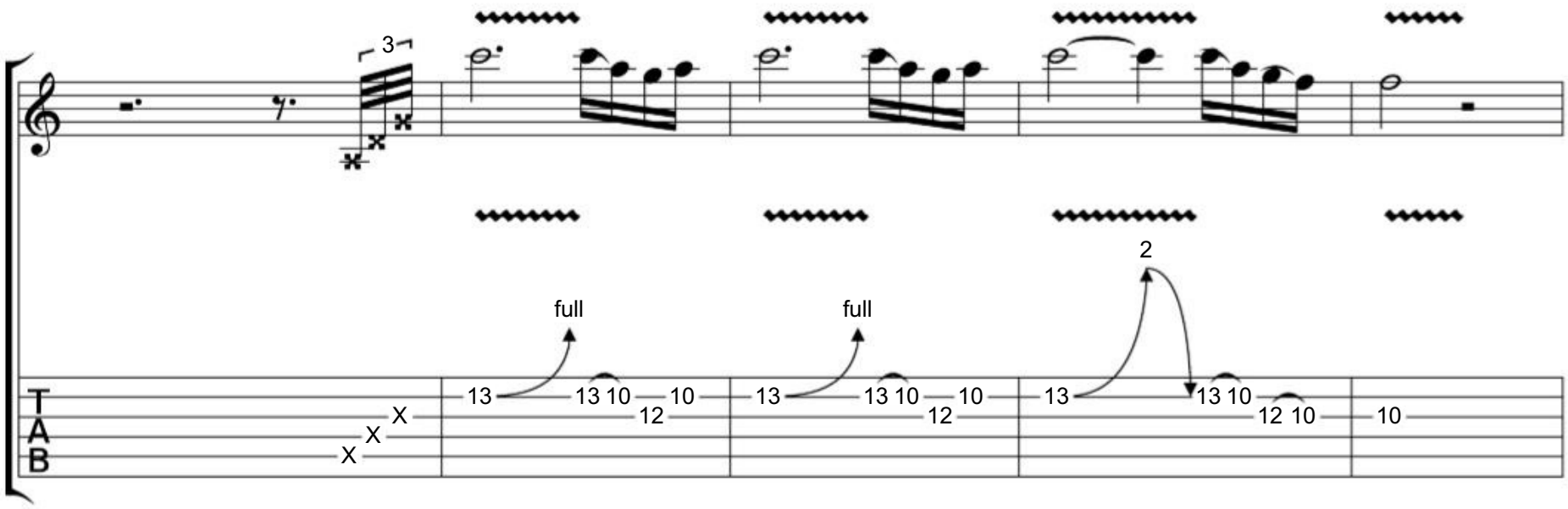
SLINKY GUITAR PHRASING

Gilmour is known for his effortless phrasing and ability to move swiftly and melodically around the neck. This D minor pentatonic lick demonstrates just that. Keep this one loose and try to maintain an even pick attack throughout, so that each note transitions smoothly into the next.



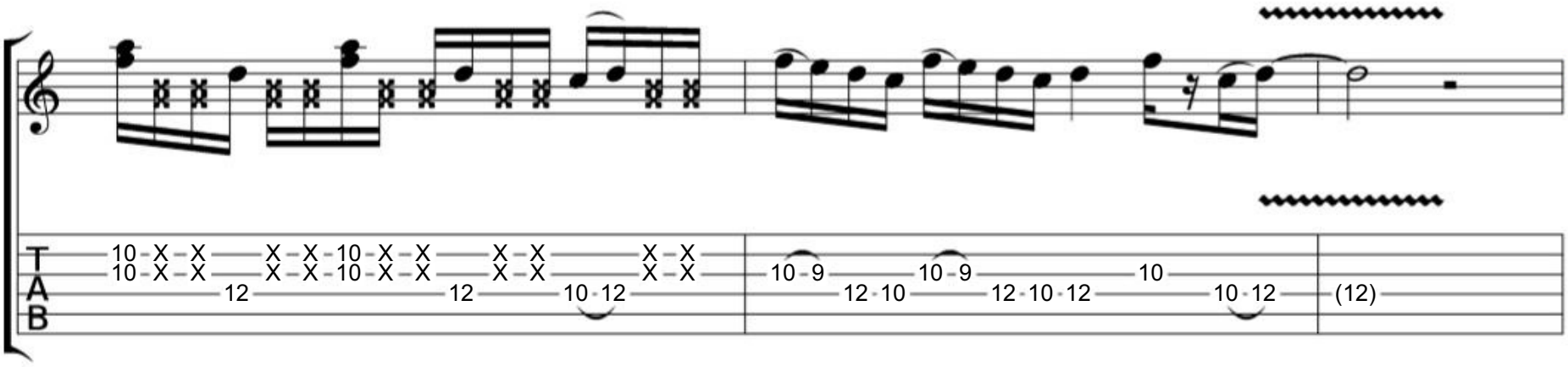
RAKES AND STRING BENDS

This lick begins with a trademark Gilmour string rake into the first bend. To do this, rest your spare fretting-hand fingers across the strings, drag the pick down the muted strings and release the mute before you hit the bend. The third bend is the one to watch out for – this is the iconic two-tone Gilmour bend. You're bending that 13th fret note up two whole steps to the 17th fret.



FUNKY LEAD LINES

This lead line is a straight 16th lick that switches between muted notes and fretted notes. This is a brilliant way to break up those slinky blues lines with something a little more rhythmic.



Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He has taught hundreds of students face to face and via the musicteacher.com platform. He has more than 10 years' experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher. Follow @leighfugeguitar on Instagram.

CHORD CLINIC

A MAJOR

WORDS ROD FOGG

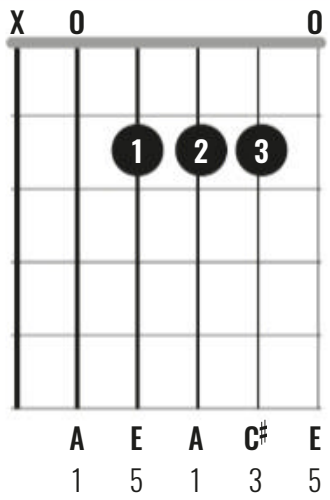
In this month's Chord Clinic, we're exploring a few new ways to enliven your chord progressions by playing A major all over the guitar

The A major chord is one of the easier chords to play but, on guitars with close string spacing, players with large fingers sometimes struggle to hold down all three notes cleanly. Don't be afraid to squash your fingers together tightly here, and angle your hand so that the fingers are as close to the second fret as possible.

A major is a great key for songwriting, partly because chords IV and V (D and E) are available to you as open-string chords. Unfortunately, all the other common chords in A, such as Bm, C♯m and F♯m don't really work as open-string chords.

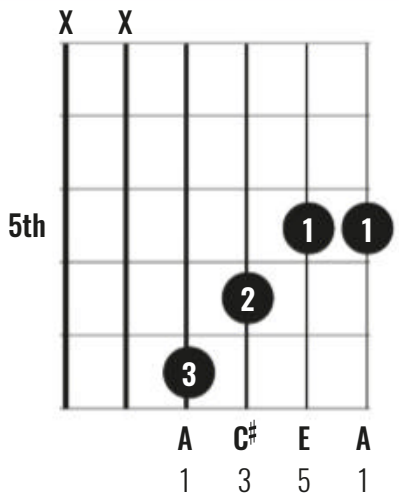
The notes of A major are A, C♯ and E. There are many ways to play A major on the guitar, and the basic chord can easily be adapted to include the usual extensions: sixths, sevenths, ninths and so on. However, here we're going to stick with the basic A major chord, working through as many voicings and inversions as we can. Enjoy toying with these chord shapes and we'll see you next month.

Figure 1: A



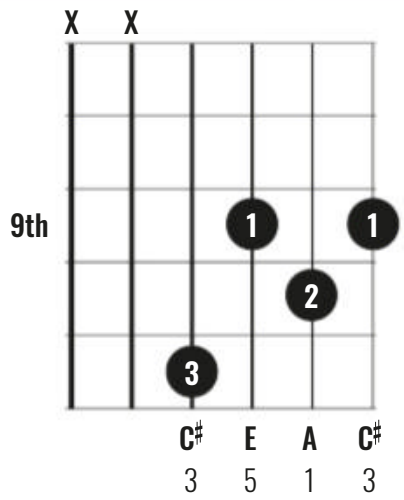
Ideal for everything from folk strumming to heavy rock, this is the fundamental A major chord that most of us learn early in our guitar playing career. You can also just play the middle four strings, or the four highest strings, which will give you A/E, which means A with an E bass.

Figure 2: A



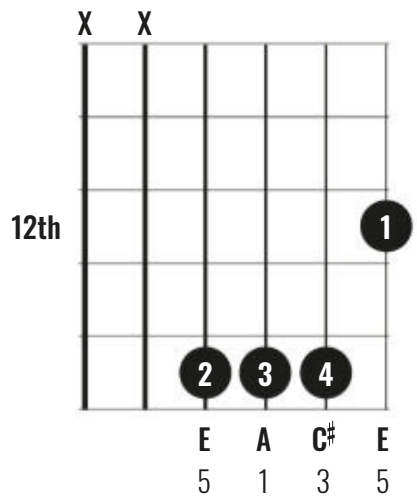
Chords sound the strongest in root position and this movable shape is good for choppy rhythm and funk parts. The higher voicing gives it more sparkle, ideal for indie-style arpeggios too. Add the open A string for more weight. Playing only the three highest strings is also an option.

Figure 3: A/C♯



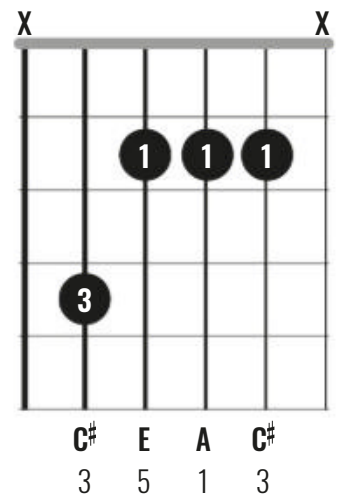
Moving higher up the guitar, this first inversion chord (because C♯, the third, is in the bass) adds even more sparkle. The top three strings and the inner three strings both give you an A major chord, while a world of fascinating arpeggios awaits as you switch between these two three-note shapes with the optional open A string too.

Figure 4: A/E



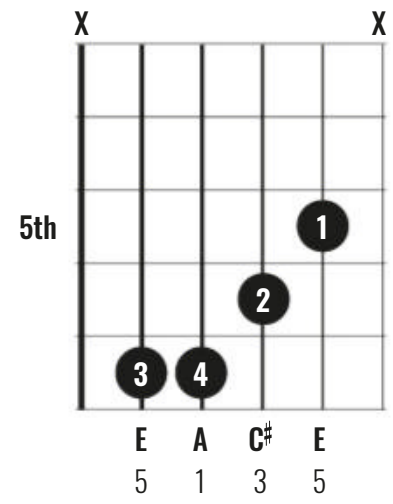
This second inversion shape is essentially our standard A major (figure 1) but played as a four-string chord above the 12th fret. You can also play figure 2 at the 17th fret, giving you the entire neck in four-string A major chords with root position, first, and second inversions.

Figure 5: A/C♯



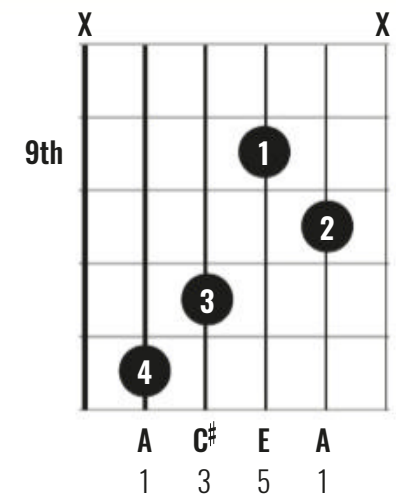
Here, we've reverted back to figure 1 but added a C♯ bass note, creating a first inversion voicing an octave lower than in figure 3. Adding bass notes to chords in this way can provide strong root movement – try playing figure 1, figure 5 and then a D major chord.

Figure 6: A/E



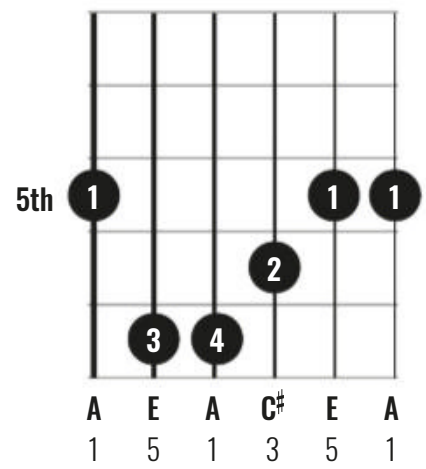
Staying with the middle four strings, this second inversion chord still offers choppy rhythm flavour but boasts a beefier lower voicing. Mute the outer strings with the underside of your first finger and the tip of your thumb. Release the finger pressure momentarily for percussive strumming effects.

Figure 7: A



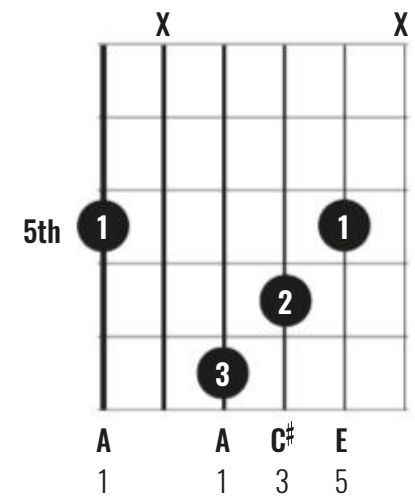
This root-position chord may not be the most comfortable but you'll get used to it. Its voicing on the wound strings rather than the plain strings of figure 2 lend it a certain depth. We like these chunky four-note chords a whole lot.

Figure 8: A



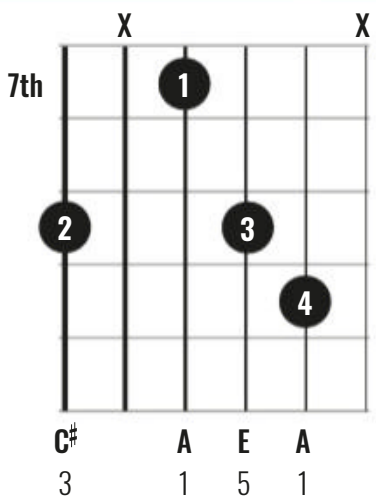
Pursued vigorously by beginner guitarists, the full barre chord is seen as something of a holy grail. It sounds superb in some circumstances but experienced players are more likely to play figure 9 unless they really must have the high A at the top.

Figure 9: A



Removing the unnecessary doubled notes from figure 8 gives you a cleaner, tighter, and more manoeuvrable chord. We'd suggest, however, that if you're playing a nylon-string, getting your thumb over the edge of that wide neck might be tricky. Instead, re-finger it, play a barre chord or switch over to a steel-string!

Figure 10: A/C♯



Here we have a first inversion chord that follows on from figure 9. Try playing D or D minor next. You could also go back to figure 1 and work your way through the chords, substituting G♯ for A, to make an A major seven chord. Or add G for A7, F♯ for A6 and so on. Have fun and see what you come up with.

Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), *The Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to bestseller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com

TALKBOX

ISY SUTTIE

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Following the release of her new novel *Jane Is Trying*, the *Peep Show* star, author and comedian discusses Frank Zappa, knitting on tour and why good cables can be more important than guitars

The moment it all started...

"When I was about 11, I wanted to play the saxophone and my mum thought I wouldn't stick to the clarinet, which she said I had to learn before. That might have been her way of trying to put me off. She said, 'I think you should play the guitar because it's a much more versatile instrument.' Because I was singing already, she said you can probably write songs more easily on a guitar than on the sax. There was a guitar in the window of a charity shop. I think it was a Yamaha. It wasn't an incredible guitar; it was kind of a functional guitar but it did exactly what I needed it to do. I loved it immediately."

I couldn't live without my...

"The guitar I've got, which is the 3/4-size Martin, I really, really adore and I feel like I couldn't live without. I've gotten used to the size of it. Now when I play a full-size guitar, it feels odd. I used to have a Martin Backpacker and when I play that now I'm like, 'Oh my god, this feels like a ukulele'. Similarly, when I play a full-size guitar, I'm like, 'This feels like holding a massive bear.'"

The one that got away...

"I haven't lost any guitars but I have lost loads of leads. I haven't had many guitars. That Yamaha I got when I started lasted until I got my Backpacker. There was one more that was also a Yamaha, a better one that lasted me years. I don't feel sad that it's gone and I don't know where it is. But I used to have favourite leads, which sounds weird because they were just run-of-the-mill black cables but I feel quite attached to them and I would always leave them at venues. Then I got these leads that look like they're made of climbing rope, they're brilliant. I got them because I thought I'd never leave them at venues and I think someone still nicked one. I think a tech might've been like, 'That's a very nice lead, I'm gonna have that'."

My signature model...

"I think Martin guitars are amazing. I've always wanted a 12-string. I've played other people's but never owned one. My dream guitar would be one that could be a six or a 12-string with the press of a button. It would definitely be designed by Martin and I don't think I want to go back to full-size ever. My daughter's posted loads of toys into my guitar. Even though I've taken the strings off, there are like two or three cars in there that are too big – I don't know how she got them in – so I think it'd be nice to have a new guitar anyway. Maybe it should just be the same guitar that I've got but without toys in it!"

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"*Secret Heart* by Ron Sexsmith. But I play Feist's version. Feist did a cover of it that's very simple. That's always what I play first, and then I play one of my own songs straight after that. Even if I'm writing a song and have a deadline, I play that song."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"When I'm writing a song, it's important not to have my phone in the room and not have any distractions. It's good just to have like five or six hours with nothing going on, and be alone to do it. Also, someone once told me you should always play a guitar first to work it out. Sometimes people get quite bewitched and don't play them, just buy them, or don't play them for long enough. It's like buying jeans; you need to spend five minutes playing it and see how it feels."

My Spinal Tap moment...

"I was in a lot of bands growing up. I was in a band called MicroFish. We only ever did about three gigs. At our first gig, which was in Belper in Derbyshire, people hated us so much they were throwing full cans of beer and lit fags. I was only about 15! My mum had given me a lift there and when I got back in the car, she asked, 'How'd it go?' I just said 'Yeah, it was great'. But really thinking, 'Oh my god'."

My guilty pleasure...

"It's weird, isn't it? I don't feel guilty about listening [to music]. I love Queen and for some people that might be a guilty pleasure. I don't know why Queen is sometimes seen as slightly uncool. I like *Safety Dance* by Men Without Hats. That's a bit of a guilty pleasure. I think it's their only hit. It's an odd song."

I wish I was there...

"I love Frank Zappa. I feel so sad that I didn't ever see him live. I went to Amsterdam once and saw some of the Mothers Of Invention, and some of the musicians perform Zappa songs, and it was amazing. I wish I could've seen him live. He covered so many different genres, I sometimes feel like he was too good, and people don't know how to categorise him."

The first thing on my rider...

"It would be beers. I was gonna say knitting because I love knitting and I don't get to do it enough. So maybe wool and lager."

If I could just play one thing...

"My partner listens to a lot of Bert Jansch and I think he's amazing. I'd love to be able to play in that style and that beautifully."

Jane Is Trying **is out now via Orion Publishing Co.**
Public House: A Cultural and Social History of the London Pub **is out now via Open City**

© Matt Crockett

CREATE EVERYWHERE

THE BEST GETS BETTER: FLYBY ULTRA BACKPACK

Upgraded from the inside out with new materials and added gear protection, the FlyBy Ultra is the ultimate sidekick for creators wherever they go.

MONOCREATORS.COM/FLYBY-ULTRA

mono®

DEPT.10 | DUAL DRIVE

THE WORLD'S MOST ADVANCED VALVE PEDALS

PREAMP WITH TRUE VALVE TONE AND POWER

HIGH VOLTAGE VALVE PREAMP PEDAL

Running at more than 200V, the ECC83 triode at the heart of this pedal delivers organic dynamics, tone and break up. With four pro-quality clean and overdrive voices, this is the best valve overdrive pedal you will ever own and a world-class valve recording preamp.

CAB RIG SIMULATOR TECHNOLOGY

Cab Rig is our next-generation DSP speaker simulator that reproduces the sound and feel of a mic'd up guitar cab in incredible detail. Deep-dive using the accompanying Architect software and capture the incredible tones via USB / XLR out or headphones.

PRO CONNECTIVITY AND INTEGRATION

Along with your favourite amp, there are many ways to connect the Dept. 10 Dual Drive pedal. Use the USB audio interface for pro-recording or the XLR D.I. for professional live use. The built-in effects loop is perfect for integration into your existing pedalboard.

STANDARD 9V POWER

Unlike most valve pedals, the Dept.10 Dual Drive runs on just 9V. Simply plug it in alongside your other effects using a standard pedal power supply.

Designed & Engineered by Blackstar Amplification UK

Blackstar® AMPLIFICATION

the sound in your head

SCAN ME to learn more about our Dept. 10 pedal range